Blood, sweat & tears : The photographs of Bill Henson

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Blood, Sweat & Tears:
The Photographs of Bill Henson

By
Deborah Pearson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
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Abstract

This study interprets, evaluates, and contributes to current theories and debates surrounding Bill Henson's photographs. Henson's photographs have been largely circulated as autonomous, fine-art "objects" and interpretations of this work have generally concentrated on representation/s of the body, emphasising the ephemeral and ambiguous. This study critically analyses such discourse so as to examine the assumptions that cluster around the body and bodily representation.

The aim is not to judge the photographs, but to interrogate potentially different readings and interpretations. Recognising my own circumscription within this research, I remain self-critical toward my own conclusions. The methodology employed is interdisciplinary, bringing together textual analysis, dominant photography theory and postmodernism. Photographic discourse is called into question as a locus of discursive conflict as this study fuses these intellectual trajectories so as to examine the need for a (currently lacking) photographic paradigm to be expanded.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except for where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date 28/1/98.
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Introduction

_not being able to see the whole structure is partly what the work is about -
the way in which things go missing in the shadows._  Bill Henson

Bill Henson’s photographs and the discourse(s) that surround them are somewhat “missing in the shadows”. John McDonald’s (1988) review of Henson’s book _Bill Henson: Photographs_ (1988) highlights the “divide” within which the photographs have been viewed; as “gruesome voyeurism or social comment?” (p. 91). From this position, we are asked to form an opinion about the work within pre-determined parameters, are they art or exploitation?

What is of interest for this research about McDonald’s question lies in its invitation to participate in a discursive conjuncture about sexuality, art, photography, morality and consumption. Questions (such as McDonald’s) illustrate and contribute to the way in which the photographs are understood and are indicative of the dominant discourses surrounding the work. Consider the National Gallery of Victoria’s curator of photography Isobel Crombie’s (1995) description of Henson’s _Untitled 1994-95_ series:

_The feelings associated with this Romantic nether region between light and dark cannot be accounted for by the mere absence of light. They seem tied to some residue from our prehistory when it was not only the unknown on earth that one feared in the shadows but the unseen unknown. There is a sense in which the young people in these photographs have found a place far enough away to permit whatever they are bound to do, and at a time when they will remain all but unseen._ (p. 14)
Similarly, Heyward (1995) states:

The idea of metamorphis is central to all of Henson's work. We see things at the instant before the evidence of their existence disappears, or becomes the evidence of something else. . . . Sometimes these pictures almost successfully resist our ability to see them. (p. 24)

These writings illustrate how Henson's photographs are framed as authored products, following a tradition that Marsh, (1995, p. 34) has noted “raises the artist to the status of heroic seer.” Marsh suggests that this type of discourse is “fraught by Western metaphysical stereotypes steeped in humanism” (p. 34). This “heroism” is made evident by Malouf (1988) who refers to Henson as “a maker of magic” (p. 9).

Discourse that surrounds Henson's work also depicts the depth to which photographs have entered the art canon as discrete objects of study. The mystification serves to render cultural aspects of the pictures invisible as they are embedded within a discourse of “fine art”; which is to say that they are produced, articulated and circulated within a particular discursive space.

Critical paradigms used to legitimise “great” works of art have been transferred to the interpretation of photographs so as to sanction the enculturation of “art” photography. As Burgin (1982) argues, ways of thinking about photography have been “dominated by a metaphor of depth, in which the surface of the photograph is viewed as the projection of something which lies ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ the surface” (p. 11). Hence, the struggle to obtain art status for photographs was won on the predication that there was depth ‘beyond’ or ‘behind’ the surface; depth which could be attributed to an author. This is evident in Heyward's (1988, p. 43) introduction to the book Bill Henson: Photographs:
*Untitled 1983-84* has that quality found in music, and in literature when it is working in the first instance dramatically, of mood or dominant tone established with such swiftness and strength that the mood becomes generic and is articulated through the work with a dynamic complexity.

However, as Burgin (1982) continues, the surface of the text "reveals nothing but the fact of its own superficiality" (p. 11).

This problematises the current writings on Bill Henson’s photographs, and invites speculation of the voices which polarise the work. Underpinning most writing(s) around Henson’s photographs are assumptions about subjectivity and art which serve to legitimise the status of both Henson’s work and art theory generally. As Burgin (1983) suggests, art discourse is:

> incapable . . . of examining the modes of constitution of its putative objects within its own discourses, and the positions (institutional, national, racial, sexual etc.) from which these discourses are spoken.

(p. 42)

Art theory for Burgin is flawed as it fails to engage with its own status, or question its own assumptions. Art criticism has normalised aesthetic concerns by abstracting them from the cultural institutions named by Burgin. This is illustrated by the methods of investigation as applied to Henson’s photographs¹ which determine the questions asked about the work, thereby normalising assumptions regarding subjectivity and creating a space where controversy is presented as a critical mode of investigation.

¹See also Crawford, 1988; Hayes, 1989; Hogan, 1992; Holloway, 1986; Martin, 1985; Smec, 1996.
The enculturation of Henson’s photographs into the art canon may appear to be a simple, causal relationship which Henson has successfully manipulated in order to be successful. And this is certainly a relevant argument. However Henson’s photographs are not “essentially” systems of monetary exchange, they are not “essentially” anything at all. As Burnett (1995) contends, “photographic images neither illustrate thought, nor are thoughts illustrated by the pictorial. Photographic images are silent, blind, unseeing” (p. 17). This position draws attention to readings of Henson’s photographs, raising questions of the assumptions of those who mark the borders and boundaries of the work.

The representation of young and sexualised bodies in Henson’s photographs has been a locus of debate, polarising audiences and critics. This polarity can be seen as a debate of form/content which is undercut by modernist and postmodernist concerns, with the body as unstable site within both the former and the latter. Bill Henson’s representations of bodies are far removed from ideal representation/s which have traditionally been the focus of modernist fine art photography. His images demonstrate this flux. For although young, beautiful and sexualised, Henson has represented the bodies as abused, fractured and damaged. Given Grosz’s (1994) assertions that subjectivity depends upon a coherent or fixed body, Henson’s photographs can be seen to problematise subjectivity.
Of course, not all critics have read the images in this way or simply bought into the binary debate around Henson's work, Hayes (1989, p. 34) suggests that "Henson's success as an artist lies in his ability to convey . . . a sensibility or worldview that a sufficient number of people find interesting and true". Yet, such a conclusion does not really engage with Henson's pictures on any satisfactory level and when Hayes asks himself "in what sense do I enjoy (because indeed I do) an image which has such implications" (p. 34), he draws himself back into a debate from which he sought refuge; a debate primarily focused on the body.

When describing Henson's *Untitled 1983-84* pictures, Malouf (1989) proposes the bodies are "caught just before they blurred out of existence, with the darkness exploding in their mouths and eyes, they were like ghosts" (p. 6). Comparably, Heyward (1995) states; "flesh floats and drifts before our eyes, transformed even as we see it into smoke and shadow . . . we see things at the instant before their existence disappears" (p. 24). Oppositional debate has argued that the bodies represented are exploited and objectified for the viewers pleasure: "Henson's imaged junkies—all of whom look pretty sick to me, one of whom is now dead—ascend all to easily to the state of pure metaphor" (*Photofile. Autumn* 1986, p. 32).

Both advocates and critics of Henson's work cluster around the use of the body, affirming its ambiguous status. This conforms to discursive contention surrounding the status of the (postmodern) body and the implication(s) of representation. For photography, this argument is particularly pertinent as according to Pultz:

photography has been the most widespread means of visual communication of the past century and a half, and has done more than any other medium to shape our notions of the body. (1995, p. 7)
It can be argued that photographers have produced transgressive imagery which challenge social and cultural demarcations. Robert Mapplethorpe has often been regarded in this way. Indeed for Jean-François Lyotard (cited in Sarup, 1993, p. 99) "language is the side of censorship and repression; figural representation is on the side of desire and transgression". Yet photography has occupied a central role in the establishment of a rhetoric of social surveillance and control. As John Tagg (1988) states photography was

bound up with the emergence of new institutions and new practices of observation and record-keeping... which were central... to the development of a network of disciplinary institutions—the police, asylums, hospitals, departments of public health, schools. (p. 5)

Photography as such is not locatable within Lyotard’s constitution, but rather occupies many disparate and conflicting discursive spaces. Consequently, photography is always fraught with implications of power, knowledge and consent. The power matrix of photography according to Marsh (1995, p. 34) is “tied up in an unresolved and perhaps unresolvable dialogue between absence and presence”. These implications are stressed within photographs of the body which could be seen to literalise the splitting of the subject in the thing itself.

Audiences who have criticised Henson’s photographs have addressed the problematics of portraying young, nude models represented as injecting drugs, bleeding and post coital. It is the age and type of body represented in these images which has attracted debate. It is what is “seen” which is under attack through ethical concern for the “real” models photographed, and the “real” morals of the photographer.

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3 See Photofile, 1986.
The idea of a "real" subject or even a "real" photograph has been disrupted as cultural studies argues that a photograph's evidential status is culturally produced rather than inherently within any privileged relationship to "reality" including a "real" author or the "real" meaning of a photograph. Similarly, the idea of a "real" or essential subject has been radically re-thought in critical theory and now recognised as split; contextual and permeable rather than fixed or coherent.

In contrast to aesthetic theory, photography theory emerging from cultural studies⁴ argues that photographs are discursively potent cultural artefacts and powerful social tools, moving beyond the rhetoric that photographs are either "evidential" or "fine art". As Solomon-Godeau (1991) states:

> What informs all modern approaches to the politics of photographic representation is not a platonic protest at the dissimulative nature of photography (the camera lies), but the far more disturbing apprehension of the power of mechanically or electronically generated images to render ideology innocent, to naturalize domination, to displace history and memory. (p. xxxiv)

Marxist based criticism sought to restore the political contexts of history and memory to photographs. Dominant concerns within photography theory have been (marxist) preoccupations with ideology and politically entrenched institutions (the art canon, mass media) targeted as cultural oppressors that served to maintain cultural and political hegemony.

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⁴ See Burgin, 1982; Sekula, 1982; Solomon-Godeau, 1991; Tagg, 1988; Webster, 1980.
These arguments cluster around the photograph itself and criticism which fails to engage with images as social, cultural and gendered sites. Indeed, much of the sociological and intellectual discourse surrounding photographic theory has drawn critical attention to this function. In tracing a trajectory of a photographic paradigm, sociological, marxist criticism has traditionally been the binary opposite of "bourgeois" art criticism. Yet a marxist based critical framework is not without its own uncertainty. As Fuery & Mansfield (1997, p. xiv) assert "the significance of such molar social difference ... are easily detectible". Yet issues of subjectivity are arguably not so easily known.

Testing the self-proclaimed flexibility of cultural studies, Hartley (1992) suggests, that the "radical discipline" of the 1960's has reached middle-age and is "no longer an intellectual enterprise on the left but an academic subject increasingly of the centre" (p. 16). Hartley's implication is that the institutionalisation of cultural studies has necessitated the establishment of a regulated identity. A desire for recognition similar to other disciplines has propelled cultural studies into a particular trajectory and the dominant object of investigation remains the mass media.

Hartley (1992, p. 25) claims that cultural studies' preoccupation with the media is facilitated in order to "establish and maintain another kind of hegemony: its own claims to moral authority and intellectual leadership in the field of cultural criticism". In isolating its studies, there appears to be significant absences regarding what is seen as appropriate to investigate within cultural studies. As Hartley has stated, "the agenda of cultural studies ... predetermines its object of study" (p. 25). Because the "object of study" preferred by cultural studies was/is the mass (read popular) media, there is a binary opposition, "a demarcation line between cultural studies and the aesthetic disciplines" (Hartley, 1992, p. 25).
Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler (1992) suggest that it is a “common misconception” that cultural studies is “primarily concerned with popular culture” (p. 11). Yet my concern is not about cultural studies' assertions of the problematics of an elite/popular binary division, my concern is with cultural studies' privileging of the popular in opposition to other forms of communication and with normalised critical practices within cultural theory, where the mass media is regarded as socially and culturally relevant and the aesthetic as elitist or socially inert. The problematic of such binary oppositions is identified by Hartley (1992):

It is often the distinction between opposites that blinds innocent bystanders, for although it stands to reason that black is black and no amount of analysis will make it white, it is nevertheless rare, in both physical and cultural domains, for things to be in fact as black and white as binary thought makes them appear. (p. 32)

Theory then is itself a site of struggle for social and textual power and theoretical oppositions serve to maintain these divisions. As Hartley (1992, p. 25) comments “all such demarcations do violence to the facts of the situation”. The demarcations or fluxes are normalised within communication studies and this renders photographic analysis fraught with contradictions between the text itself and (its) cultural significance.

Burgin’s (marxist) call was for a photographic criticism that aimed “to understand photography not only as a practice in its own right but also in its relation to society as a whole” (p. 4). However the assumption of a “whole society” or even a “whole photography” has been destabilised, for as Hartley (1992, p. 31) points out “discursive knowledge is precisely what is real for our species, and reality is what we imagine (make into an image)”. 
Hence, problems inherent in the interpretation of texts are made evident as the original ‘Artwork’ as autonomous, transcendent object is called into question. This problematic is taken up by Burnett (1995, p. 6) who suggests there is a “crucial shift of twentieth century media, which are defined by their incompleteness, by their incapacity to totalize, to fully represent the world they both form and respond to”.

In contrast to Burnett, Hartley (1992) stresses the materiality of images, when he argues that

No picture is pure image; all of them, still and moving, graphic and photographic, are ‘talking pictures’, either literally, or in association with contextual speech, writing or discourse . . . . they are institutionally produced, circulated within an economy and used both socially and culturally. (p. 28)

Consequently, Burnett’s “silent” image is problematised. However, both Hartley and Burnett argue against the dominant idea that images can be in any simple way “read”. Burnett’s interest is in tracing the image as a “vehicle through which spectators create constellations of meaning” (1995, p. 135). This is a critical point of difference between Hartley and Burnett, and their arguments reflect that separation. Although Burnett’s phenomenological argument is undercut with assumptions of subjective autonomy, his promise of a “radically different explanation of images” (p. 135) does offer strategies which prove useful for this research, particularly his ideas on projection.
Describing projection as a space “between image and viewer, a meeting point of desire, meaning and interpretation” (p. 136), Burnett (1995) proposes that projections, are “filters” which are “always in transition” (pp. 136-137). This negotiated space is not confined by temporal or structural determinations, so that a linear model of image to viewer/spectator is ruptured. This is, Burnett argues, because “no one moment satisfies the exigencies of communication, no one image or interpretation . . . constrains the excess flow of information” (p. 137).

Projection then, is a space within which the viewer(s) negotiate meaning(s), and is in many ways similar to the audience studies models from cultural studies albeit with a psychoanalytical slant, a shift from global to local. The mass communication audience studies model has struggled with oppositions between textual and audience power and is fraught with socio-political implications regarding the power relations and speaking positions of the researcher/receiver relationship. Most of the problematics in audience research are not relevant here as audience studies has primarily addressed “mass communication” (television). Yet the implications of context are relevant to Burnett’s model which, as I have pointed out, wrenches both image and viewer from the social. Nevertheless, as Marsh (1995) argues:

everywhere we look the symbolic has already coded the corporeal, there seems to be little use in pursuing the idea of authenticity, or originary experience. . . . but, having acknowledged the hegemony of the word, it is evident that such hegemony/law/control makes for excess. (p. 32)
It is just such a model of “excess” which I will pursue in this research. Burnett contends that a shift away from image determinism may seem “heretical” (p. 137), similarly, the attempt to culturally locate the photographs under consideration in this research within a bricolage of conflicting and unresolved positions may seem “heretical”. So it is perhaps useful to outline the excessive and heretical vision of Friedrich Nietzsche which precedes much of the theoretical framework I consider.

As Jardine (1993, p. 435) states “the shock of recognition that Western Truth, and the Western desire for Truth, have been a terrible error is what Nietzsche leaves for the twentieth century”. Nietzsche’s apocalyptic vision questions sense making structures:

What then is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and theoretically intensified, transferred and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (cited in Higgins & Magnus, 1996, p. 30)

As Sarup (1993, p. 45) confirms “for Nietzsche . . . there is no single physical reality beyond our interpretations, there are only interpretations”. Nietzsche’s tenet influenced poststructuralists who challenged the foundational claim of structuralism whereby “truth” could be found by looking at the structures of human practices and experiences. Poststructuralism challenges this assumption “on the grounds that there can be no truth or truths . . . outside the constructions of such sensibilities” (Fuery, 1995, p. 38). Moreover, poststructuralists moved beyond criticism of Saussure’s model of communication and became interested in the ‘slips’ or ‘fluxes’ so that Saussure’s model is expanded to “tell us something about how meanings are generated, sustained and politicised” (Fuery, 1995, p. 39).
Cook & Kroker (1988) argue that Nietzsche's vision privileges the Dionysian:

Nietzsche's legacy for the postmodern scene is that we are living on the violent edge between ecstasy and decay; between the melancholy lament of postmodernism over the death of the grand signifiers of modernity—consciousness, truth, sex, capital, power—between the body as a torture-chamber and a pleasure-palace; between fascination and lament. (pp. 9-10)

Nietzsche's "legacy" of the ruptured subject as outlined by Cook and Kroker is far removed from the Cartesian model of unity with the mind as unequivocal. If Nietzsche's argument against truth can be argued as contributing to the rupture of the self, then the second and most critical influence of Nietzsche is that he problematised "the opposition between 'metaphor' and 'concept', 'body' and 'mind' " (Sarup, 1993, p. 45).

Turner (1991a) suggests that Nietzsche sought to re-introduce the body into German middle-class cultural and aesthetic debates by attacking societal discourse of Greek rhetoric and showing that:

aesthetic experience had more in common with sexual ecstasy, religious rapture or the frenzy of primitive dance than it did with the quiet, individualistic contemplation of a work of art in a spirit of disinterested, rational enquiry. The sensual and erotic response of the body rather than the neutral enquiry of the mind was the core of all artistic experience. (p. 12)

For Nietzsche, representation, as aesthetic experience embodied the discursive struggle between rational, Socratic thought and Dionysian intoxication. What is at stake of course in this argument is a criticism of the classic Apollonian/Dionysian split. Nietzsche was highly suspect of "rational" discourse and his attempt to subvert such discourse was done through the heresy of highlighting the body.
There are fundamental problems however with how Nietzsche envisioned this “body”. As Nietzsche was writing against the German aristocracy, his introduction of the body was undercut by the desire to disrupt conventions of the time. The shift in emphasis was a move from the mind to the body and this raises questions about the binary logic in Nietzsche’s argument. As Scott Lash (1991, p. 261) points out, Nietzsche’s theory of the body draws heavily from the biological qua biological as for Nietzsche, the body can explain moral and psychological afflictions. This is evident as Nietzsche (cited in Lash, 1991, p. 261) states that causes of such afflictions “may lie in an affection of the sympathetic nerve, or an excessive secretion of bile, or a deficiency of alkaline sulphates and phosphates in the blood”.

Nietzsche’s embodied, Dionysian subject then, is, by all accounts informed by the Enlightenment. Habermas (1993, p. 54) makes this clear when he asks “wherein does the Dionysian differ from the Romantic?” Nietzsche’s “liberated” subject is embedded in metaphysicism with the discourse of the rational countered by the Dionysian; the culture/nature dichotomy. However, the Dionysian as a model has perhaps been more fruitful than it first appears.

Nietzsche’s arguments against truth and insistence on the “corporeal aspects of existence” (Patton, 1991, p. 44) has been taken up in various ways by cultural theorists. The problematics of reducing the text to the dry, semiotic moment (as emphasised in structuralism) gave way to a more fluid type of analysis which recognised that both the “text” under consideration and the analyst were contingent. Poststructuralism transformed “the object of analysis, desire, into an essential part of the analytic process” (Fuery, 1995, p. 2).
Hélène Cixous's (1986) strategy of the *écriture feminine* as a "commitment to moving beyond ... the knowable ... derives from a close study of Nietzsche" (Sarup, 1993, p. 112). Cixous attempts to theorise and create a system for articulating (women's) pleasure outside of patriarchal structures, moves from the rational and stable to the plural and diverse. As Cixous is opposed to binary systems of thought, she seeks an alternative knowledge which operates outside of male/female, mind/body or culture/nature debates. Cixous sees the pluralistic qualities of women's pleasure as a challenge to patriarchy so that instead of seeking equality, she seeks to subvert and transcend.

In a similar fashion, Julia Kristeva (1982) argues that the *sémiotique* offers alternative practices of language. Kristeva's unstable site of subject-in-process is a struggle between the structured, ordered symbolic and the chaotic, corporeal *sémiotique*. In contrast to Cixous, Kristeva sees the binary demarcations as productive: "it is at the margins [Kristeva argues] ... that the "challenges and disruptions" take place" (Feury & Mansfield, 1997, p. 123). For Cixous and Kristeva, the challenges and disruptions operate at the point of writing, yet I would argue that this can be equally applied to "reading" practices, which I think is what Burnett is implying.

For Burnett (1995), "what we define as the visible (in the form of an image or the act of seeing) never fully contains within it the range of experiences we need to maintain a genuine feeling of control" (p. 127). This "slippage" of control is precisely what Kristeva and Cixous are advocating, the contingency of interpretation as described by Burnett, is at the demarcation of body/mind.
Moving away from static notions of "reading" a text, Burnett (1995) suggests that "most of the dichotomies that we have comfortably used to explain mediation to ourselves in the latter part of the twentieth century are no longer applicable" (p. 7). If "incompleteness" is a defining characteristic of twentieth century media, then this renders contemporary analytical methodology at best, inadequate. The contingency of meanings which can be attributed to a "media" is beyond the scope of any particular analytical approach. This is a crucial problem for this research generally: in light of these concerns how do we approach the analysis of photographs? More specifically there are two main areas of concern: what methodology is most productive when analysing Henson's photographs and is this methodology fruitful for moving outside of circumscribed reading practices?

This problematising of both analytical methodology and the role of the researcher organises my approach to the interpretation of the texts under consideration. Accordingly, I do not presume any simple denotative meaning/s or necessarily seek to unify the parts of the text/s to a cohesive whole. I also do not purport to reveal the "real meaning" or "truth" of the images which has been "missed" in other interpretations. I do seek to interpret the photographs within an interdisciplinary framework which exploits their polysemic nature so as to explore the possibilities of different reading positions.
By investigating contemporary theory and discourse which currently surrounds Bill Henson's photographs, I suggest that the photographs are "moving targets" that resist sealed readings. This analysis then, does not purport to establish a complete picture but rather offers a specific one; it is not my intention to argue for a particular theoretical framework or reading of the photographs per se, but to interrogate the way in which things have gone missing in the shadows; the boundaries which are structured around photography and the body.
Chapter One

Textual Bodies

But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body. (Nietzsche, cited in Grosz, 1994, p. 127)

Part of the attraction of Bill Henson’s photographs perhaps lies in the controversy surrounding the images, in the desire to participate and debate about art and exploitation, moral and immoral practices, power and powerlessness. The rhetoric around the images is similar to that which surrounds many photographs, and many photographers. The concerns which are raised by critics are not then surprising or new. What is surprising, given the perpetual imaging of the body, is the lack of discussion of that body outside of the contexts of abused/ephemeral and this prompts speculation as to why these normalised frameworks were established and are maintained.

The concept of the body as something to be controlled and privatised, has long permeated Western culture. Embodiment was problematic for modernity and rational discourse which focused on Progress and Truth. The privilege of mind over body in modernity translated as:

the triumph of culture over nature. Bodily matters either become subservient to, or objects for, rational modernity, or linger as a source of embarrassment or awkwardness in the wings of a modern social order (Morgan & Scott, 1993, p. 2)
This raises the question as to why the body is the source of such anxiety and why contemporary or postmodern culture continues to assert the need for bodily integrity and control. As Frank (1991, p. 40) states “the modernist conflict between the body as a constant in a world of flux, and the body as the epitome of that flux, is carried forward into the postmodern” (italics in original).

Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argues that the coherent and unified subject is “always precarious” (p. 43) and must be “continually renewed. . . through its ability to conceive of itself as a subject and to separate itself from. . . others” (p. 44). It seems that the subjects’ sense of self depends upon the demarcations and limits of the body. Grosz contends that the disintegration of the unified body:

risks throwing the subject into the preimaginary real, the domain inhabited by the psychotic. . . [where] the sense of autonomy and agency that accompanies the imaginary and symbolic orders is lost, being replaced by the fantasies of being externally controlled, which are images of fragmentation, and being haunted by part objects derived from earlier, more primitive experiences. (p. 44)

Does this then explain why interpretive frameworks of Henson’s photographs seek to ensure that the body is considered within set polarities? For if the subject is always precarious as Grosz argues, then subjectivity is at risk with fractured and leaking images such as Henson’s. Therefore it is necessary to recontextualise the work so as to affirm and solidify the framework which has become problematic. To control the body.
Yet, as Grosz (1994) notes, “bodies are fictionalized, that is, positioned by various cultural narratives and discourses” (p. 118). Attempts to control “the body” can be seen then as an attempt to articulate the body into socially and culturally sanctioned spaces. The way in which this enculturation is desired and/or resisted is difficult to pin down however, for it is never fully clear what precisely constitutes the body.

How is the body perceived? Grosz (1994) argues that there are two trajectories of thought for thinking through the body. Phenomenological and psychoanalytical accounts privilege the “interior” of the subject, so that lack or desire induces the subject from within to socialisation. In Grosz’s terms, this is a focus “on the body as it is experienced, rendered meaningful, enmeshed in systems of signification” (p. 116). Within this sense, the body is constituted as “the boundary, limit, edge, or border of subjectivity” (Grosz, 1994, p. 115).

The second trajectory of critical interrogation of the dominance of interiority, began with Nietzsche’s focus on the body. This trajectory of thought outlines “the procedures and powers which carve, mark, incise—that is actively produce—the body as historically specific, concrete, determinate” (Grosz, 1994, p. 116). As Grosz points out (p. 117), this highlights the outside surface of the body as a text. In terms of subjectivity, the contrast lies in modes of socialisation. In phenomenological and psychoanalytical accounts, the “social ‘enters’ the subject through mediation and internalization of social values” (Grosz, 1994, p. 120) whereas in a social inscription model “social values and requirements are not so much inculcated into the subject as etched upon the subject’s body” (Grosz, 1994, p. 120). In short, “law and constraint replace desire and lack” (Grosz, 1994, p. 120).
What is of interest in Grosz’s tenet, is her identification of the body as a surface between two conflicting accounts of subjectivity. The tension between inside and outside, self and other, comes back to this strip in either account as something to be contained and controlled. If control is a central concern for the discourses of the body, and for contemporary culture, this is illustrated through obsessions with body management, which can be seen as constructed through the discourses of personal empowerment and social acceptance.

In figures 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3, body management allows for example, the transcendence of social limitations, increased enjoyment from life and longevity. The subject to which these mediated messages address is constructed as “the new woman” (figure 1.1), who has “less to worry about” (figure 1.2) and “a lot to stick around for” (figure 1.3). So that trendsetting, autonomy, freedom and transcendence, constructed through gender and sexuality are the rewards for those who practise body management.

As Turner (1991b, p. 159) has noted “diet . . . and regimen are obviously forms of control exercised over bodies with the aim of establishing a discipline”. For Turner, dietary regimes are derivative of a Cartesian position where “the body is nothing else than a statue or machine of clay” (p. 160). For Frank (1991) the disciplined body attempts to neutralise instability:

with regard to control, the disciplined body makes itself predictable through its regimentation. So long as the regimen is followed, the body can believe itself to be predictable; thus being predictable is both the medium and the outcome of regimentation. (p. 54)
Figure 1.1 Advertisement for Pure Oxygen inline skates in *Shape* (May, 1997)
Life Is More Enjoyable When You Have Less To Worry About.

I am a work in progress. I teach myself. I set my limits. I have convictions. I thrive in all environments. I trust my instincts. I nurture my family, my career. I see that my needs are met. I choose what I will become.

Susan Lark M.D. and Schiff have developed a special line of Nutritional Systems containing vitamins, minerals, herbs and other essential nutrients. All Susan Lark products contain a self-help program with recommendations on diet, exercise and lifestyle factors. Products formulated to provide the maximum benefits during every stage of a woman's life.

Figure 1.2 Advertisement for Schiff vitamins in Shape (May, 1997)
"I'M DOING IT TO SEE MY GIRL GROW UP TO BE A COWBOY."

You've got big reasons to lower your cholesterol. So eat foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, be physically active, watch your weight, and know your cholesterol numbers. 'Cause you've got a lot to stick around for. Call 1-800-575-WELL for more information.

**Figure 1.3** Advertisement for National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in *Shape* (May, 1997)
As part of regimen, the disciplined body is "dissociated from itself" (Frank, 1991, p. 56). With regard to contemporary discipline in the regimes of diet and exercise, this can be found in sport and dietary/health culture and surrounding discourses. Pain in physical activity or cravings in the dieter are then problems to be overcome. In figure 1.4, it is stated that "pain is weakness leaving the body", this clearly demonstrates the dissociation from feelings of the body in order to discipline. The text in figure 1.4 asks "how strong can you become? . . . that's up to you". As Grosz (1994, p. 143) notes, body management and discipline are not enforced, they require the consent, in fact the willingness of the subject. This is demonstrated in figure 1.5 which suggests "taking control", the subject of the article stating that "through discipline, dedication, self-motivation and consistency, I have obtained my ultimate goal".

Expanding on this argument, Grosz (1994) points out that "there is nothing natural . . . about these modes of corporeal inscription" (p. 142). Diet, exercise and body management shape and mark the body as "appropriate, or as the case may be, . . . inappropriate" (Grosz, 1994, p. 142). In this way, dieting and exercise can be seen as "performing specific tasks in socially specified ways, marked, branded, by a social seal" (Grosz, 1994, p. 118). The coherent and controlled body is an applied process of subjectivity. Yet although exercise discourse often speaks of transcending the limits of the body, the aim perhaps of these regimes is to reinforce those very limits; to establish and maintain a unified body (and therefore subjectivity).
Figure 1.4 Advertisement for Adidas shoes in *Shape* (May, 1997)
Taking Control

I realized food could no longer be the most important substance in my life.

Looking back at my life, it seems hard to believe that I allowed weight and food to take over my body and soul. Growing up, I was always very active and energetic, but I ate things like fried chicken, collard greens with ham hocks and macaroni with lots of cheese — and went back for seconds and sometimes thirds.

During my first pregnancy I weighed 220 pounds and knew I could be healthier. Luckily, I had a great gym teacher who had lost weight. I decided if she could do it, I could do it. She pushed us hard. I worked out with a Jane Fonda aerobics tape every day and ran two miles on the track three times a week. By the time I graduated in 1985, I had lost 50 pounds on a diet of tuna with crackers and salad, and exercising. I hadn't yet learned how to eat properly.

My first year of college, weighing about 165, I felt confident because I had lost weight. I began dating, having fun and indulging in food. A few years later, I got married, weighting 200 pounds. The weight began to creep up again and I stopped exercising. I neglected myself and focused only on my husband's happiness.

During my first pregnancy at age 22, I weighed 270 pounds. After my son was born, my left side became numb. The doctor told me the pregnancy had made my blood pressure too high and I needed to lose weight. I felt the weight would come off naturally after giving birth and by breastfeeding, I didn't take the doctor seriously.

During my second pregnancy I weighed 286 pounds; with my third child I weighed 293 pounds. During each pregnancy they told me I would be hospitalized if my blood pressure continued to elevate. My doctor suggested blood pressure medication or weight loss after having both babies.

After my third baby, I made up my mind that I was not going to be that size anymore. Being obese practically all my life was very depressing. I was too young to be on medication permanently. I realized food could no longer be the most important substance in my life.

At 277 pounds, I joined the fitness center at work. I started watching my fat intake and walked daily. Within a few weeks, I saw my weight reducing. My co-workers sponsored a weight-loss contest. I lost 21 pounds in six weeks by watching fat and calorie intake, walking about two to three miles a day with weights, and doing the stair climber and treadmill. I won the contest. From that point three years ago, I've been dedicated to eating healthfully and living well.

I now can look at myself in the mirror and be very proud of what I have accomplished. Through discipline, dedication, self-motivation and consistency, I have obtained my ultimate goal.

Patricia A. French

Georgia
Age: 31
Height: 5 feet 11 inches
Pounds lost: 107
Inches lost: Waist: 8
Hips: 5

Workout Schedule:
Aerobic activity (stair climber, bike or treadmill): 15–20 min/5 times a week
Weight training: 45 min/5 times a week (alternating upper and lower body)

Maintenance Tips
1. Count your fat grams and try to keep a written log of the food you consume each day.
2. Drink at least eight glasses of water a day. Gradually build up to it.
3. Every so often, give in to cravings, but continue your healthful eating with the next meal.

Figure 1.5 Magazine promotion “Success Stories” in Shape (May, 1997)
In contrast, “deviant” bodies do not define themselves through the discipline of dietary and exercise regimes. The deviant body is represented as deriving pleasure from the excess of body as opposed to pleasure from personal control of the body. In figure 1.6, the picture denotes a performance of body art, where symbols are being drawn on the body. The man being inscribed wears a wooden stick through his nose, a loincloth and two small horns on his head, he looks like a devilish and primal being.

In the lower left picture his body is being inscribed with a sharp blade, and although there is blood running from the incisions, he has a look of pleasure on his face so that he is embracing the pain, not to overcome it like the athlete in figure 1.4, but to relish the sensation. In comparison with the aforementioned athlete, this man seems to also see the pain as evidence of a transition, with the athlete it was a transcendence beyond the pain, with this picture the man is being inscribed so as to embody and relish in the pain. It is interesting to note that the hands of the inscriber or artist who is making the incisions upon the body are similar to a surgeon’s hands. The white gloves and head to foot clothing can be seen as subverting Western medical discourse as owner(s) of the body. The text on this picture reads “I also had experiences where I’d cut my sister’s finger with a razor blade just to see the blood come out... I just wanted to see what was on the inside”.

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Figure 1.6  *Ron Athey*

(Cadaver, 1996b, p. 65).
What can be said immediately of this comparative imagery of athlete and fetishist is that the photographs from *The Torture Garden* seem to offer a site of resistance to the sanitised, discipline of the advertisements. Yet is there really a sound basis for this assumption? Foucault (1987) suggests that categories of sexual suppression and resistance are not so easily accounted for: "pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another" (p. 48). As Foucault (1987) argues, "the machinery of power" (p. 44) that "different" sexuality saw itself as opposed to was what actually gave it a "visible, and permanent reality" (p. 44).

This discursive circuitry creates a "sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure" (Foucault, 1987, p. 44) through the exchange of discourse. For Foucault, pleasure and power are bound within the naming of other sexualities for both the normative power structures and the "deviant" practitioners. This is achieved through what Foucault refers to as a "double impetus" (p. 45) of power and pleasure. Foucault describes this double impetus as "the pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies . . . and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it" (p. 45).

Hence, power is the means of production for deviance, and this locks sexual polarities within a nexus and calls into question the meaning of "transgressive". As Foucault (1987, p. 45) confirms "these attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*" (italics in original).
The book which figure 1.6 is taken from is a promotional text for The Torture Garden which is a fetish club in London. The book is riven with exotic imagery and asserts that the club is "a new dimension of limitless possibilities" and "multi-dimensional, ever evolving and mutating. It defies definition" (Wood, 1996, p. 4).

Wood describes The Torture Garden as:

not a 'fetish' club, not a 'S/M' club, not a 'body art' club, not a 'Modern Primitives' club, not a 'straight' club, not a 'performance art' club . . . not even a 'night club' (p. 4)

In the reproduction of information sent to all new membership enquiries (Wood, 1996, p. 8) outlines the objectives of the club:

The T.G. [Torture Garden] dress code strives to avoid narrow limitations, encouraging individuals to be aware of their bodies and sensuality and exploring personal fantasies and the pleasure of the flesh.

The implicit message in this text is indicative of Foucault's argument that Western culture speaks of sex as something which has been repressed. For Foucault:

What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervour of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights. (1987, p. 7)
The promise of sexuality as an essential site of transgression is enmeshed in discursive practices where "the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression" (Foucault, p. 6). Indeed the "appearance" of the images of *The Torture Garden* would certainly appear to be transgressive, yet I would argue that both the photographs and the club can be seen as defined by what they are not; that is they rely on the boundaries of normal/abnormal in order to mean and are thus tangled within Foucault's web of power/pleasure. This can be demonstrated through the prohibitions and limitations embedded within. For under the heading Dress Code, in the same text that speaks of "avoiding narrow limitations" (p. 4), and defines itself as a "dimension of limitless possibilities" (p. 4) is the following statement:

But the dress code is strictly enforced: CYBERSEX, FETISH, BODY ART, S/M, FANTASY, GLAMOUR. No casual street clothes (jeans etc). (Wood, 1996, p. 8)

The codes and conventions of these disciplined bodies are as rigorous as those of body management. The discursive boundaries which suture the categories of "normal" and "deviant" are implicitly expressed through the policing of the binary divide.
Frank (1991) suggests that the practice of bodily discipline has provided a vehicle for transgression and subversion of social norms. For example, the ascetic practices of dietary discipline by medieval holy women can be seen as an embodied resistance. As Bell (cited in Frank, 1991, p. 58) observes, fasting is “one aspect of the struggle by females striving for autonomy in a patriarchal culture”. Frank (1991) argues that fasting was an oppositional space for women between “religious discourse and the discourses of marriage and feminine submission” (p. 58). Citing the case of Catherine of Siena, who became “divinely inspired” when her parents attempted to marry her off against her will Frank points out that Catherine “became a confidante of the Pope and a powerful political figure of her time” (1991, p. 60).

Corporeality provided Catherine of Siena with a tool of resistance to a dominant patriarchal discourse, yet as Frank (1991, p. 60) argues (with a nod to Foucault), “resistance will often reproduce that which it initially opposed”. For Catherine of Siena, and others like her, this meant that “disciplined resistance only ended by reproducing the patriarchal discourse which had driven the women to resist” (Frank, 1991, p. 60).

The question which is raised at this point then is given Foucault’s model of discipline and pleasure and the reciprocity which he suggests define those relationships, is it possible to resist and transgress? Sarup (1993) points out that although Foucault’s assertion that resistance always accompanies power is appealing, “resistance is really a residual category in Foucault’s work” (p. 82). Sarup concludes to say that in Foucault’s model and conception of power “there can be no escape, no locus of opposition or resistance” (p. 84).
Grace and McHoul (1995) on the other hand suggest that Foucault’s model enables the intelligibility of power so that resistance can be made explicit through an “interrogation of the tactics employed in a struggle” (p. 87). In short, that the naming of the relationship of powers and struggles is in itself transgressive, and resistance is possible through the recognition of “techniques” of power as distinct from resistance of power in itself.

For the tattooing, inscribing and marking of the flesh as found in The Torture Garden images, it can be argued that they are exposing the marks and discourses which are “written on” the subject; literalising the inscriptions. Such imagery highlights the textuality of the body as a superficial script. Grosz (1994, p. 139) suggests that tattoos and body markings “create not a map of the body but the body precisely as a map”. In this way, the images are showing attempts to control the writing on the surface of the body; functioning as an extreme form of body discipline. Similarly, the fasting of Catherine of Siena and her contemporary counterpart—the anorexic or bulimic—can be seen as attempts to subvert dominant discourses which constitute the body. In addition, the markings of the athletic body which is “constrained, supervised and regimented” (Grosz, 1994, p. 141) are no less visible than the scars of tattoos or the skeletal frame of the anorexic body. There is no “visible” outside to such cultural inscriptions. As Grosz (1994, p. 141) concludes “the civilised body is marked more or less permanently”.

To summarise, I have outlined several discourses on bodily discipline, focusing particularly on a small aspect of embodiment; the polarities of disciplined bodies within the discourses of body management and body deviancy. Through these discourses, flesh is made into particular types of bodies, either socially sanctioned or socially deviant in this case. Yet as Grosz (1994) points out “different procedures of corporeal inscription do not simply adorn or add to a body that is basically given through biology” (p. 142). This is in accordance with Foucault’s assertions that bodies are a socially and historically mapped construct.

That given, it has not been my intention to attempt to explicate the essential meaning of embodiment, its ontological body-ness, nor particularly to expose the “ideology” of bodies at work within these texts. Rather, I wanted to demonstrate that even within such a limited framework, there are complex and multi-discursive assumptions that produce meaning of/for the body as a site of repression and resistance, pleasure and power. I have demonstrated these positions through the analysis of the previous texts, but the status of the body as such remains unresolved.

Within these positions, we are still operating from within a binary divide of adherence to or deviation from cultural norms. It seems that power is attributed its own corporeality, as something which lies against or on the subjects’ skin. Within Foucauldian analysis, the representations of the bodies under consideration are locked into a power struggle which is somehow certain. It is unclear then how aspects of alternative readerships can be accounted for in this model. For if we accept the concepts of deviancy and normalcy as socially constructed, if not sanctioned, then any power relation between these polarities is necessarily also socially constructed.
Continuing on this theme, Grosz’s (1994) argument is possibly the most useful: that the “enmeshment in disciplinary regimes is the condition of the subject’s social effectivity, either as conformist or subversive” (p. 144). There is no way for subjectivity to be conceived outside of discourse, and Foucault’s strategies do make clear the inevitability of dependencies. Yet as Grosz asserts, these networks or webs of power/pleasure never “render us merely passive and compliant” (p. 144). Transgression and compliance are not merely fixed positions which “dupe” readers and/or subjects. Although the binary divide of the dietary discipline advertisements and the images from *The Torture Garden* has been brought into question in this chapter, I will take the position that both the texts and possible reading positions are open. My assertion is that *The Torture Garden* does not offer an implicitly transgressive space, any more than the advertisements tie readers to a compliant one. The dominant cultural norms and ideologies which are locked into texts such as the dietary advertisements do adhere to prescribed ideals about bodies and body maintenance. Yet this does not prevent those discourses being used by readers for their own purposes.

So, in order to problematise a binary divide of body/mind or pleasure/power, it seems that the circuitry of textual assimilation in itself needs to be reconsidered, for the oppositions of us/them, good/bad, normal/deviant to be merged. My assertion is that such fracturing of the binaries will encourage the questioning of the divides. Can this divide or circuitry of pleasure/power be problematised? Is it desirable to do so? And how does or would this translate into photographic practices and readerships?


Textual Desires

Language is a skin . . . My language trembles with desire.
(Barthes, 1979, p. 73)

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do.
(Barthes, 1987, p. 17)

If tracing embodied reading practices in photography, Roland Barthes is the reader par excellence. For Barthes, the relationship of text/subject is complex. In his seminal work Camera Lucida (1993), Barthes made this complexity explicit with a phenomenological mediation on photographs through a framework of desire.

Barthes' “desiring” body in Camera Lucida (1993) is written upon by the recent death of his mother. In this book, Barthes ponders about the absence of a sufficient theoretical model to account for what he experiences when viewing a picture of his dead mother. Lamenting the dominant paradigms of photographic inquiry, Barthes suggests that they are either technical or historical/sociological, either looking at “very close range . . . [or] obliged to focus at a great distance” (p. 7). In seeking then a middle ground, Barthes states “looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture” (p. 7).
If Foucauldian analysis focuses on the body as a social object, “a text to be marked, traced, written upon” (Grosz, 1994, p. 116), then Barthes’s phenomenology focuses on the body as “it is experienced, rendered meaningful” (Grosz, 1994, p. 116). Yet in a similar way to Foucault, Barthes regards the body as a text. A marked difference in the theoretical models is that Barthes constitutes the subject through a Lacanian lack1 whereas Foucault sees subjectivity formed through power.

The text, for Barthes “is neither the material object nor even its various guises and systems . . . . for him the text is formed in the act of reading” (Fuery, 1995, p. 65). Barthes’ approach to the text highlights reading as a creative act which “generates plurality in meaning” (Fuery, 1995, p. 69). The originality of Barthes’ writing lies in its personal style and diversity of subject matter within which Barthes makes problematic any notions of a rational, disinterested analysis. Yet in order to look critically at Barthes, it is important to accommodate his writings in their temporal framework, spanning structuralism and poststructuralism. In favour of these positions, there was an attempt to articulate “the subject” through the “twining of textual analysis and psycho-analysis” (Johnson, 1996, p. 98). But in doing so according to Johnson (1996) they “neglect questions of the production of cultural forms or their larger social organisation” (p. 98). Before moving to examine these implications in Barthes, I wish to look at the summation that Barthes provides in *Camera Lucida* of the fate of photographs and readers.

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Barthes (1993) perhaps considers the photograph as potentially excessive, or at least, that is what he seems to imply when he asks if the photograph is "mad or tame?" (p. 119). Like Burnett (1995), Barthes ultimately sees the reader as the conduit for the meaning(s) and potential(s) of a photograph when he states: "...he choice is mine" (1993, p. 119).

The choice of "mad or tame" for Barthes (1993), is also however bound up in the struggle between authenticity and taste, a lamenting of mass production:

The other means of taming a photograph is to generalize, to gregarize, banalize it until it can no longer ... assert its special character .... This is what is happening in our society, where the photograph crushes all other images by its tyranny: no more prints, no more figurative painting, unless henceforth by fascinated ... submission to the photographic model. (p. 118)

Barthes asks us to "consider the United States, where everything is transformed into images: only images exist and are produced and consumed" (p. 118). For Barthes such "so-called advanced societies" (p. 118) are "more "false" (less 'authentic')" (p. 119). Calling for the elimination of images (p. 119) Barthes wishes to "save immediate Desire (desire without mediation)" (p. 119). This is a call inevitably, for authentic and unmediated experience.
For Iverson (1994, p. 450) *Camera Lucida* is “a lovely, alluring story in which we want to believe, but by which we ought not to be taken in completely”. Indeed, Barthes’ readings highlight a problematic of speculative, phenomenological accounts of texts and the general tendency of reception theory not to account for the socio-cultural. For if we are to take seriously the proposition that the social and contextual contribute to and may indeed define the meaning of a text then it is difficult to simply “accept” the position offered by Barthes, alluring though it may be. Yet, in many ways, criticism of *Camera Lucida* proves as difficult as the text itself.

Victor Burgin (1989) argues that Barthes “rejects” psychoanalysis with his phenomenological approach by his refutation of the unconscious. Burgin insists that such a position “has sever consequences as it denies photography theory a body of research which, I believe, is crucial to its development” (p. 83). The most disturbing aspect of Burgin’s argument is his indiscriminate subscription to psychoanalytical theory: “Freud has made it clear enough . . . and Lacan has since been perfectly explicit” (p. 83). Burgin is possibly revealing more of his own assumptions and intentions with these statements than he does of Barthes’.

Burgin’s criticisms of *Camera Lucida* is that Barthes fails to adhere to a prescribed theory of psychoanalysis; that he problematises it as such.
I want to propose, that the opposition that Barthes sets up whereby photographs are “mad or tame” is the recognition of the excessive potential readings of photographs. Moreover, this opposition is not a functionally driven structure as Barthes suggests: “tame if its realism remains relative . . . mad if this realism is absolute” (p. 119), but is rather always contingent and fluid, so that historical, sexual and cultural difference are highlighted rather than collapsed “into” the text or supposed of an homogenous audience. It is any certainty of the image which I wish to discard, the claim that the photograph, when generalised “completely de-realizes the human world of conflict and desires” (Barthes, 1993, p. 118).

In such a dystopic view, we are rendered powerless to the assault of photographic texts. In this sense:

> without the arbitrary characteristics of the image and the photograph, we would be locked into a representational system of predictable messages with equally predictable responses and interpretations. (Burnett, 1995, p. 61)

Burnett (1995) states: “my position will be different from Barthes. He is worried about loss and absence. My concern is with the rich discourse . . . and the creative use made of photographs” (p. 33). So too, I am interested not in the hegemony of the image but in the potential for excess. As Burnett notes, this is not an assertion of “an ever-fluid or overly dominant notion of subjectivity” (p. 61), but a consideration of the “sites of struggle and contestation where the aim is not to deny linkages of meaning but to broaden the scope through which they are created and maintained” (p. 61).
The polysemic potential of the photograph (indeed all texts) is inherent in all pictures, be they "mad or tame". As I discussed earlier, the bodily discipline images cannot wholly contain their meaning yet I do not see this as embedded within or distinctive to any particular photographs. As Burnett (1995, p. 42) concludes: "in the final analysis it is what viewers do with the photograph that counts".

Texts and audiences are moored in the social and the cultural. In arguing for a contingency of the text, I am not supposing an outside to these issues. While Barthes (1993) and Burnett (1995) offer a complex account of texts as made by viewers, omissions of the social by Burnett (despite claims to the contrary) are clearly problematic. Similarly, Barthes's decontextualising of the photographs under his consideration trivialises the content of the pictures. For although it is a strength of Camera Lucida that Barthes attempts to articulate his own readings and in doing so makes problematic disciplinary boundaries, there is a tendency which Johnson (1996) has noted is evident in such "twinning" of semiology and psychoanalysis to "account of readership . . . from the critics own textual readings" (p. 98). Moreover, in such accounts of reader determination, there is an assumption that "real readers are 'wiped clean' at each textual encounter" (Johnson, 1996, p. 103). Which brings this discussion back to Foucault and Grosz.
In Grosz's (1994) account of knowledge and bodies, the two trajectories under consideration here render the body as a binary from which it is considered as a text to be written upon which creates subjectivity (from the outside in), or as something which is experienced and creates the subject (from the inside out). Clearly, neither position is without questions and contradictions. When I look at or experience a photograph, I am not powerless against a dominant or preferred reading, nor am I in any way free of social and cultural circumscription. Grosz's (1994) description of the body as a strip (p. xii) locates the corporeal as a site of struggle for meaning(s), as a space for the problematising of binary divides. Although Grosz derives this strip from Lacan's description of a Möbius strip, her interpretation creates the body as "both an inside and an outside" (Grosz, 1994, p. 116) so that in either account of subjectivity, the struggle is formed on and through the body. In adopting this position, public and private are linked together in a more fluid way than in fixed cultural or aesthetic frameworks.

The implication for representation and interpretation of the body is for a model which moves through formal considerations and aesthetic perception to social implications. These interpretations will not simply champion the "value" of a picture in formalist terms, but recognise that personal response is always overwritten with the social. The next chapter examines some of the traditions and exclusions which have permeated representations of the body, and then looks at ways in which these exclusions can be seen to be addressed in Bill Henson's pictures. My argument is that Henson's inclusions challenge dominant interpretations which have clustered around the work.
Chapter Two

Nature, Culture and Photographed Bodies

"Neither the body nor photography has any set meaning". (Pultz, 1995, p. 8)

A "site of struggle" for meaning(s) has been a consistent motif in Bill Henson's work, beginning with his Untitled 1983-84 series which represents urban junkies and sumptuous European interiors (refer to figures 2.1 & 2.2). These photographs juxtapose high/low culture, youth/age, production/consumption, light/dark, male/female, clothing/nudity and nature/culture; binary oppositions which have undercut most of the discussed criticism of Henson's work.

The culture/nature dichotomy is evident in these photographs, they highlight the dynamic of the "split", with the Apollonian undercut by the Dionysian. This is by no means a simple or innocent proposition, for the Dionysian blurs and makes ambiguous the unified and coherent subject. Within this context, it could be argued that the Baroque interiors are represented as sterile, consumptive and restrictive. This barrenness can be seen as metaphoric for spiritual emptiness of a materialistic society. The young junkies in the pictures are "victims" of this environment (and its implicated bourgeois perpetrators).
Figure 2.1  *Untitled 1983-84.*

(Henson, 1989, p. 54).
Figure 2.2  *Untitled 1983-84.*

(Henson, 1989, p. 58).
It is from this “reading” of Henson’s photographs that most of the debates revolve, with the photographs situated as “Gruesome Voyeurism or Social Comment?” This invites speculation as to whether the images interrogate the social issues within which the young people find themselves or exploit the device of interrogation for pleasure. These two possible interpretations make clear the ambiguity of interpretation and context, the meaning(s) of the text shift according to the perspective of the viewer.

Another way to view these texts is to consider not the juxtapositions of the subject matter but the similarities which are being portrayed. In a particularly obvious presentation of a nature/culture dichotomy, there are questions being raised about the corporeality of aesthetics. It is through the consumption and “framing” of bodies that the “worlds” of nature/culture intersect.

The Apollonian and Dionysian are described as bound together within culture through struggles which are fraught with relations of power. Paglia (1995) suggests the Dionysian is:

the chthonian realities which Apollo evades, . . . the muck and the ooze . . . the dehumanizing brutality of biology and geology, the Darwinian waste and bloodshed, the squalor and rot we must block from consciousness”. (p. 8)
The “rot and squalor” which we must “block from consciousness” is exactly what Henson foregrounds in Untitled 1983-84. In this series, Henson brings Dionysis into play as an eroticised space. The sanitised baroque architecture and paintings are juxtaposed with the angst and sexuality of the young bodies (refer to figures 2.3 & 2.4). Adrian Martin (1985) has referred to this series as “a rather gothic and universalist representation of the symptoms of very real and material stresses and strains” (p. 22). The opulent interiors of the museum are rendered as the phallocentric frames within which these bodies are placed and then dominated.

For Paglia (1995), culture has not corrupted or destroyed the subject, as culture is exactly what saves the subject from total annihilation: “Society is not the criminal but the force which keeps crime in check” (p. 3). Richardson (1994) suggests that such structure is thought to protect subjectivity:

In becoming aware of the reality of death, humans sought to flee it, to provide themselves with a security that would deny the very awareness they found difficult to accept. To achieve this sense of security required work. And work in turn needed to be protected from disorder (the disorder of violence and exuberance) . . . . taboos therefore came to be erected as an essential protection for the structure of society. (p. 101)

Paglia (1995) argues, that the Dionysian continually threatens to overwhelm culture so that society is a necessary structure without which nature would consume us. Sex as the interface between culture and nature is considered dangerous: “Sex is the point of contact between man and nature, where morality and good intentions fall to primitive urges” (p. 4). A “Paglian” reading of Henson’s Untitled 1984-85 may suggest that the “damaged” subjects are not victims of bourgeois culture but victims of the fluxes of culture, where nature has overridden cultural barriers and the subjects have fallen to “primitive urges” and become lost in the Dionysian.
Figure 2.3  *Untitled 1983-84.*

(Henson, 1989, p. 65).
Figure 2.4  *Untitled 1983-84.*

(Henson, 1989, p. 66).
Paglia's accounts of an hysterical and monstrous "nature" are by no means new. Moira Gatens (1991, p. 80) points out that "the motivation behind the creation of artificial man is the 'protection' or 'defence' of natural man". For Gatens, this rhetoric is embedded in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*:

> by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, in Latin CIVITAS, which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence is was intended; and in which the _sovereignty_ is an artificial _soul_ , as giving life and motion to the whole body; the _magistrates_ , and other _officers_ of judicature and execution, artificial _joints_; _reward_ and _punishment_, by which fastened to the seat of the _sovereignty_ every joint and member is moved to perform his duty, are the _nerves_ , that do the same in the body natural. (Hobbes, cited in Gatens, 1991, p. 80)

This is in effect the rational from which Paglia (1995) speaks when she says "society is an artificial construction, a defences against nature's barbaric power" (p. 1). Within *Leviathan* the state apparatus is naturalised through the discourses of the body so as to render the "body natural" invisible. Paglia (1995), sees nature as a threat which is literalised in women: "Woman's body is a labyrinth in which man is lost. It is a walled garden... in which nature works its daemonic sorcery" (p. 17). In this statement, she reasserts the necessity for culture over an omnipresent nature. For Kirby (1991) this position is neither new or surprising:

> as modernism/humanism can be glossed as the discourse of Man, then the hesitations that now interrupt its orthodox accounts of Truth and Subjectivity will inevitably return us to the problematic question of woman. (p. 88)

And indeed it has, for continuing social and economic crises make it difficult to see culture as secure or sufficient. As Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner (1991) argue:
it is no longer clear that dependence on human rationality will be sufficient in principle to respond to these crises, precisely because there is the suspicion that the crises are actually produced by the same instrumental rationality. (p. 24)

Paglia (1995) would perhaps argue that twentieth century atrocities are precisely the work of nature, that violence is sexual and therefore natural (from nature). In her opinion “aggression comes from nature” (pp. 2-3). It is in this way that Paglia slips through the argument of Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner (1991). For Paglia “instrumental rationality” is nature reasserting “her” primacy: “When social controls weaken, man’s innate cruelty bursts forth” (p. 3). In a Paglian model, we are all living in Tim Burton’s (1992) Gotham City with its underbelly kept at bay by a fractured and tortured hero who threatens to dissolve into his own world of demons even as we watch him. A world where a kiss is never just a kiss and the demarcation between heroes and villains is always threateningly unstable.
The fundamental flaws in Paglia's (as with Burton's) argument lies in the essentialist, misogynistic notions and eurocentric assumptions. Andrew Ross (1990, p. 27) argues that *Batman* is the "vampiric defence of white, aristocratic blood: historically tied . . . to protecting a hereditary order against miscegenation, social and biological". So too, Paglia's argument seeks to affirm and protect, only she seeks to protect culture from nature, and for Paglia, nature is woman:

"Mythology's identification of woman with nature is correct" (p. 17). Paglia asserts that "the identification of woman with nature was universal in prehistory" (p. 10). This "prehistory" is one in which we are victims of the "caprices of weather or the handicap of geography" (p. 11) from which the "progress" of culture has freed us. Although she mentions the monistic Chinese Yin/Yang (p. 11) and the symbolism of the Buddha which is "neither accurate . . . nor just" (p. 18), this "Far East symbolism" (p. 18) a form of "passive acceptance" (p. 11) of nature which renders Asian and third world societies as perpetually Other.
The main argument I am making against Paglia however is directed toward her assertions of the need to protect against “nature” as an avenging matriarch, and “woman” as the source of evil: “the Devil is a woman” (1995, p. 16). Theories of monstrous feminism are traceable throughout written history, with women’s bodies thought of as source to errors of “mankind”. Huet (1993, pp. 56-57) cites an eighteenth century French translation of a physiology text *De Monstrorum Caussis* by Jean Palfyn which locates female organs as the “site of lies, illusions, and unnatural power” (Huet, p. 57). Palfyn’s introduction to this text warns:

Now, so that the reader may have a clear and distinct idea of the womb, as well as other body parts of the Woman which are used in generation we will preface this book (which concerns monsters) with a Description of the Female Organs used for this purpose; that is, those parts of the body which cause women a thousand miseries, that irritate men in a thousand ways, that have allowed women—themselves weak and defenceless—to triumph over the strongest of men, overthrow several very powerful Kings, undo august Emperors, make fools out of wisemen, trick the learned, seduce the prudent, drive the healthy to loathsome ailments, strip the rich of their wealth, and strike down the most celebrated heroes. These organs are the cause of most of the our ills, as well as our pleasures, and I dare say that almost all of the world’s disorders, past and present, can be traced to them . . . Like some secret enchantment, these parts of the body can reproduce the most prudent of men to a sort of folly. (cited in Huet, 1993, p. 57)
Woman is rendered as the site of man's social, moral and political undoing. Is this not where we find ourselves with Paglia's argument? As outrageously misogynist as Palfyn's paragraph is, the real horror is found in the framework it is attempting to set up: the justification of medical intervention upon the bodies of women:

[Men] believe these organs in women to be full of sweetness, charm, and beauty, when in reality there are none in the body that are uglier and more subject to several very loathsome ailments, often infected with contaminated blood and much filth. They are soiled and soaked each day by urine and emit a stinking and sulfurous odor, and they are relegated by the Author of Nature to the most contemptible place on the body, as if not fit to be seen, right near the Anus and its Excrements; they are themselves the main sewer for all elements. It is here, I say, in these bodily parts, into which all the body's filth flows and accumulates like a pit, that the Author of Nature nevertheless wanted Man—this superb Animal, whose final destiny is the Heavens—to be conceived, shaped and formed, so that remembering afterward the time and baseness of his origins, he be not proud. (cited in Huet, 1993, pp. 58-59)

The monstrous feminine is outlined here most succinctly. It is interesting to compare this text with Paglia's (1995) assertion that woman "turns a gob of refuse into a spreading web of sentient being, floating on the snaky umbilical by which she leashes every man" (p. 17). The echoes of Palfyn's medical discourse permeate Paglia's argument. Figure 2.5 illustrates the assumptions surrounding women's bodies from which this medical discourse of control and domination took seed.

Nevertheless Paglia's notions of the Dionysian are useful in that they bring this research back into the binary argument of nature/culture with a recognition of the destructive capacity to which nature has been attributed, and this is relevant. For as Featherstone et al (1991) have stated:

The body as the seat of desire, irrationality, emotionality and sexual passion ... emerged ... as a central topic in oppositional writing, as a symbol of protest against capitalist rationality and bureaucratic regulation. (p. 17)
The legend reads: "In this portrait is shown somewhat modestly that which belongs to the shameful membrane of woman, which depends on the description of the womb". (cited in Huet, 1993, p. 58).
Thus a sense of what is at stake in both affirmation and denial of the body emerges; that the nature/culture dichotomy is part of a larger framework of conflict in western social theory that supports or threatens subjectivity. It is necessary to stress however that these positions are not themselves coherent or fixed, nevertheless as Featherstone et al (1991) note: “Western thought has been profoundly influenced by the dichotomies: body/soul and nature/culture” (p. 18).

As I pointed out in the introduction to this research, Nietzsche sought to subvert and transcend rational discourse by articulating the contingency of the subject through embodiment. His influence on Paglia (1995): “I follow Freud, Nietzsche and Sade in my view of the amorality of the instinctual life” (p. 20) is demonstrated in Paglia’s exploration of the Apollonian and Dionysian. In contrast to Nietzsche’s celebratory position, Paglia warns of the destructive and negative aspects of the Dionysian. Within Paglia’s argument, there are the essentialist qualities which I have identified as evident in Nietzsche. I am not however attempting to reason for or against either of these positions so as to locate the body as an authentic or essential vehicle for moving outside of discursive regimes. The body is not an essential site, it is cultured, gendered and classed, and impossible to conceive of outside of discourse. In effect then, I am not interested in the “truth” or “untruth” of Paglia’s or Nietzsche’s arguments; whether they are right or wrong. I am interested in using the concept of the Dionysian and Apollonian as a framework for locating and exploring cultural anxiety surrounding the body.
In Paglia’s argument, the interest for this research lies within her description of the dynamic of the Dionysian. While I cannot accept her suggestions of women as nature (Dionysis) and man as culture (Apollo), the model in itself is useful as a way of exploring the photographs under consideration. For Paglia’s description of the Dionysian draws from a history of ideas regarding bodily representation which have permeated social thought and continue to be of relevance. What I now wish to explore is the notion that the Dionysian is far from an archaic notion, but one that offers strategies of resistance through the problematising of static binary classification.
A (Postmodern) Winter Garden: Henson and Abjection.

I have argued that Bill Henson’s photographs have been institutionalised into the art canon and subject to discourse which has structured and maintained particular readings of the photographs. I concluded that these “reading” positions isolate interrogation into the imagery by structuring boundaries around the questions which are asked. This tradition is identified by Solomon-Godeau (1991, p. xxiii) who argues that “the way in which photography has come to be constituted as a discrete object of study... has itself determined the parameters of inquiry”.

I have also addressed issues surrounding binary oppositions, and argued that although binary oppositions are a traditional method of interpretation, these oppositions make little or no concession for interrogation of lines of demarcation as they reinforce boundaries rather than challenge them. Yet Henson’s photographs have been made sense of within binary oppositions on several levels, as an umbrella for the work (art/exploitation) and also as a way of making sense of individual pictures. Consider the following list of binary oppositions in Isobel Crombie’s (1995) introduction to Henson’s Untitled 1994-95 touring catalogue:

stone/flesh, detachment/engagement, separateness/community, intensive/subtle, fabric/skin, light/dark, instinct/intellect, male/female, violent/sensual, innocent/corrupt, familiar/unknown, chaos/unity, bleak/beautiful, day/night.

These binary oppositions place Henson’s photographs within an unstable and contradictory matrix.
Binary opposition as a sense making structure struggles to adequately describe the work, for as Lattas (1991, p. 101) has noted, "neither term can contain the radical difference at play . . . . which exceeds the simple structure of opposition". I am not arguing that these "readings" of Henson's photographs are somehow "inaccurate" or "wrong", for as Hartley (1992, p. 31) points out "the textual tendency towards binary classification is a powerful material and therefore political force". The binary oppositions then provide an entry point into Henson's photographs, for it is between these oppositions, at Kristeva's "margins", where dominant readings can be disrupted. As Hartley (1992, p. 33) continues: "the dynamics that produce change, both physical and cultural, occur precisely at the moment of the ambiguation of binaries". So the interest to this research is with that which is "overlooked" in the readings of the work, and that which is explained through binary opposition. These concerns frame the questions which I ask while analysing these photographs.
Henson’s photographs can be seen to represent the body as a social interface of the unstable subject. Henson’s Dionysian “world” is still tracing the culture/nature dichotomy which he introduced in the *Untitled 1983-84* series, but in *Untitled 1994-95* the subjects occupy the same space as the cultural artefacts rather than the juxtaposed frames of the former so that the demarcation that was made evident in *Untitled 1983-84* has blurred.

The bodies of the young people represented in *Untitled 1994-95* are bloody and dirty. Most noticeably, in several of the images the bodies of the young girls have a bloodied genital area (figures 2.6 & 2.7). These two pictures are possibly the most graphic and problematic of the series, with the girl lying naked on the ground and menstruating. The first picture (figure 2.6) shows the girl looking away from the camera and so the viewer is invited to gaze on her body.

It is probably no coincidence that this is one of the most visually coherent of the images, the jagged tears of the paper do not impose on her body at all so the spectacle of her body is uninterrupted for a short time. The white, torn pieces of paper pasted onto the photograph are quite invasive, they seep into the gaze so that attempts to take in the whole frame and master the scene are problematised. This is also a self-reflexive device which calls into question a realist reading of the photographs, as the white, torn paper is the underneath of the photographic paper and this foregrounds the materiality of the photograph as “sign”.
Figure 2.6  *Untitled 1994-95*

(Henson, 1995, p. 49).
Figure 2.7  *Untitled 1994-95*

(Henson, 1995, p. 41).
Henson could be using this device to undermine the realist reaction(s) which *Untitled 1983-84* received; to highlight the constructed-ness of the photographs. The tears also “authorise” the photographs, making the presence of the photographer evident. The obvious constructed-ness of the images work in several ways to provide a framework, one of those possibly being a reaction to the perfection of digital imaging. The jagged, torn composition and pieces of white photographic paper ensure that the images are evidently authored. As digital processes become more “perfect”, and have struggled to produce “realistic” pictures, it is perhaps a necessary strategy for “artists”. This may explain why Henson has moved away from “fixity” to slippage. Henson’s consistent¹ use of “Untitled” as a title for his work also signals a reluctance to present a preferred framework of interpretation.

The tears also prompt self-awareness when viewing the work, as the rupturing of the gaze produces the recognition of desire, so that subjectivity is deferred rather than consummated. This recognition brings the subject to the act of projection; to engage with the picture in order to attempt resolution.

¹Henson has used “Untitled” since at least 1979, the only exception to this which I am aware of is *Paris Opera* which was exhibited in 1991. For a discussion of this work and interview with Henson, see Hogan, 1992.
Social frameworks for viewing the body are called into question in figure 2.6. As Catriona Moore (1994, p. 96) has pointed out "menstruation has been associated in our culture with shame and the demand for modesty, traceable through the high store set in our society on the ability to control bodily waste and fluids". The social and cultural taboos illustrated in this image provoke anxiety of "unspoken sexuality and perceived lack of bodily control" (Moore, 1994, p. 96). As Menstruation and bodily fluids cluster around issues of public/private, Henson's pictures emphasise Western anxieties by violating these taboos.

Menstrual blood as a site of "uncleanliness" can be considered abject. As Grosz (1994, p. 205) makes clear, menstruation "marks womanhood as a paradoxical entity, on the border between infancy and childhood, nature and culture, subject and object, rational being and irrational animal". This "between" status for menstruation would then render women's menstruating bodies as abject. This would correspond with Palfyn's medical discourse. For Grosz (1991, p. 89) the abject "demonstrates the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines of demarcation, divisions between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder".
Fuery & Mansfield (1997) suggest that the purity of the 'clean and proper' corpse propre is broken down and made abject through "holes, gaps and absences" (p. 89). The distinctions between inside and outside of the subject are formed in the process of subjectivity, and are central to sustaining a whole sense of self. The "holes, gaps and absences" blur the distinction between the subject and the Other. This stresses the ambiguity of subject formation and identification for "the subject must disavow a part of itself in order to gain a stable self, and this form of refusal marks whatever identity it acquires as provisional, and open to breakdown and instability". (Grosz, 1991, p. 86). The subject is always aware of the abject, as resistance to abjection is ongoing and unstable. When the subject recognises the futility or impossibility of resisting the abject, they experience the sensation of abjection.

According to Fuery & Mansfield (1997) the abject body is:

developed and sustained in those parts of the body where the internal (body) and external (world) meet and exchange signs, where the internal is made external (blood, vomit, sperm, discharge, pus) and the external is made internal (penetration, absorption, inhaling) . . . . [emphasising] the breaking down of intactness and wholeness. (pp. 88-89)

A breaking down of wholeness, a horror of the fluid, can be understood as a fear "of being absorbed into something which has no boundaries of its own" (Grosz, 1994, p. 194). Menstruation, makes problematic the demarcation of self/other.
The body of the child/woman in Henson’s pictures is not the sanitised *corpse propre*, the idealised “clean and proper body which is ‘pure’ and whole” (Fuery & Mansfield, 1997, p. 88) but the abject body. This then problematises the viewing of this body in terms of simple domination. The represented female body is also problematised by highlighting a tradition of the (modernist) nude aesthetic, with its preoccupation on formal control. This tradition is noted by Nead (1992, p. 206) who argues that “the female form has become art by containing and controlling the limits of the form, precisely by framing it”. Consequently, the loss of control illustrated by Henson is a disruption to a dominating gaze.

In this way, a comparison can be drawn between Henson’s photograph and Sally Mann’s (1992) *Dirty Jessie* (figure 2.8). In *Dirty Jessie*, Mann examines the undercurrent of sexuality in familial relations. For Ehrhart (1994, p. 65) Mann “dares to imagine the unimaginable within the precarious refuge of the family”. *Dirty Jessie* like Henson’s image, portrays the fallen child, who is “corpse-like, . . . victimised, abused” (Ehrhart, 1994, p. 67). As Ehrhart points out, Mann’s photographs, trace the undercurrent of child sexuality which has permeated art photography so as to expose the “seamy and sexual underbelly” (p. 59) of the photography canon. Usefully comparing Mann’s *Popsicle Drips* (figure 2.9) to Edward Weston’s pictures of his young son (figure 2.10), Ehrhart suggests that by “referencing the aestheticizing tradition of photography, [Mann] spoils and disrupts it” (p. 58).
Figure 2.8  *Dirty Jessie*

(Mann, 1992, p. 22).
Figure 2.9  Popsicle Drips

(Mann, 1992, p. 51).
Figure 2.10  *Neil, Nude.*

(Weaton, 1993, p. 20).
Mann uses the conventions of documentary photography and the subject matter of the family album to foreground cultural and social taboos and sutures them to fine art. The title of Mann's (1992) book *Immediate Family* draws attention to the explicitness of this foregrounding as do the loaded titles of the photographs in the book: *Damaged Child, Jessie Bites, Goodnight Kiss, Vomit, The Wet Bed, Fallen Child*. Yet Mann (cited in Ehrhart, 1994, p. 54) states: “I think childhood sexuality is an oxymoron”. Primarily (as Ehrhart notes) this is a necessary statement from Mann in light of child obscenity laws, yet it also bounces off the work in a provocative way. For these pictures are about child sexuality, not literally the sexuality (or lack thereof) in Mann’s children, but the sexuality which adults project onto children, repress and then sublimate as is shown in “dressing up” photographs which Mann parodies in *Jessie at 5* and *Candy Cigarette* (refer to figures 2.11 & 2.12).

The similarities between Henson’s image and Mann’s *Dirty Jessie* reside in composition and the pose of the subject. Both of the pictures also portray the body covered with grime and dirt (and in the case of Henson, blood). The bodies in these pictures are located in a “natural” environment which has explicit traces of culture (Mann has the underwear and swimming flippers on the body, Henson decaying machinery and the necklace that the girl wears) and implicit traces that both of the (violated) bodies “wear” (knowledge).
Figure 2.11  *Jessie at 5.*

(Mann, 1992, p. 46).
Figure 2.12  *Candy Cigarette*

(Mann, 1992, p. 47).
Mann's *Dirty Jessie* returns the viewers gaze, defiant and self aware, she is the knowing victim. On the other hand, the girl in Henson's image does not return our gaze, her subjectivity does not challenge the pleasure that we get from looking at her body. But as previously pointed out, slippages of the frame rupture the gaze, so the female subject is less object of lust than object of the sublime, and, as such resists representation. For Nead (1992, p. 219) "the sublime is where a certain deviant or transgressive form of femininity is played out. It is where the woman goes beyond her proper boundaries and gets out of place". The representation of menstruation is a representation of a woman going "beyond her proper boundaries". This is what Douglas (cited in Grosz, 1994, p. 192) has referred to as "dirt". As Grosz points out, dirt "is that which is not in its proper place" (p. 192). Dirt signals "sites of potential threat to the system" (p. 192) through its incapacity to be assimilated into the dominant order. Dirt is also a problematising of bodily boundaries as it makes the binary opposition of inside/outside unstable.

In effect, the gaze is fractured as the inflicted damage on the represented female is written on her body rather than simply subsumed into aesthetics: the body is *about* the gaze as well as *of* the gaze. This is following in a trajectory which was pioneered by feminists so as to name the discourse of female representation as presented for male pleasure. As John Berger (1986) famously stated "men act and women appear" (p. 47). In the traditional sense of this model, women themselves were subsumed by the male gaze and saw themselves through patriarchal discourse, and as such were bound by the limitations of what it meant to "look" like (and as) a woman.
For Roberta McGrath (1987) the dominance of the male gaze in photography is exemplified in Edward Weston’s photographs. McGrath argues that Weston sought to fuse "photography and the real . . . to suppress the gap between the subject and the other's body" (p. 32). In McGrath’s psychoanalytical reading of Weston’s work, women are perpetually located as m/other. Noting the “oscillation in the work between the female body as form (pleasurable and complete) and the other axis: the sadistic cutting of the image” (p. 34), McGrath argues that women are kept in the imaginary. McGrath suggests that a strategy for overcoming the paradox of women being both “marginal (out of sight) and central (on display)” (p. 35) is the understanding the status and function of “woman” as a sign (p. 35). This is the space from which Barbara Kruger (1983) attempts to articulate in her photographs. (refer to figure 2.13).

The idea of the male gaze as privileged viewing position was embraced by feminists working in film theory (see Kuhn, 1982; Mulvey, 1988) who argued that “the viewing site offered [in film] was male orientated, and therefore denied women access to the pleasure of the text” (Fuery & Mansfield, 1997, p. 77). Yet this argument stresses textual dominance in the reading process which has been called into question in this research by Burnett (1995). For if the viewer is an active participant in the construction of meaning as Burnett suggests, then the idea of a fixed, textually determined viewing position is undermined to a large degree. This is not to suggest that a dominant perspective is not evident in texts, or that the work carried out by feminists is not relevant or important, but as Fuery & Mansfield (1997) argue “we have to look further than the idea of passive acceptance of such a viewing position” (p. 80). Similarly, Kim Sawchuk (1988) states: “to assume . . . that all looking, and aestheticization of the body is an objectifying form of commodification is simplistic” (p. 69).
Figure 2.13  Your Gaze hits the Side of my Face
(Kruger, 1984, p. 9).
As discussed previously, Sally Mann is making visible the seams of photographs by arresting naturalised conventions of fine art, documentary and family photography. By mixing generic conventions, Mann neutralises the possibility of fixed viewing or speaking positions. It is simply insufficient to talk about these photographs in purely formalist terms by abstracting the content, nor is it easy to emphasise the content without taking into account the aesthetics of the imagery, and this is exactly where I think Mann would like us to be: between form and content, art and obscenity, sacred and profane. Mann is making ambiguous the confines which Foucault (1987) has named as self perpetuating. Mann names the spiral of pleasure/power by outlining the conventions, and therefore resists the circuitry of discipline by exposing the game. Mann does this through the abject body.

For Mann, the abject is written on the child’s body in the undercurrents of family and fine art photography and is highly aestheticised. This is in contrast to the literalised abjection found in contemporary body art magazines, where the abject is the focus of the picture, rather than something which appears to exceed it. For example a picture found in Torture Garden (1996, p. 48) exemplifies the abject extraordinaire (figure 2.14) by naming the eruption of AIDS in contemporary culture which has thrown discursive norms of the body into a state of crisis. As Morgan & Scott (1993) argue:

AIDS and the discourse which has grown up around it give us a clear example of the necessity . . . to take thorough account of the body in a state of change, flux and interaction with other bodies as a site of contradictions. (p. 10)
Figure 2.14  Franko B

(Cadaver, 1996a, p. 48).
For Kroker & Kroker (1988), "we have reached a fateful turning point in contemporary culture when human sexuality is a killing zone, when desire is fascinating only as a sign of its own negation" (p. 13). Cook & Kroker (1988) suggest that HIV and AIDS "nominates sex without secretions—sex without a body—a substitute for the normal passage of bodily fluids" (p. 13).

The AIDS crisis has implicated the body and bodily fluids as the site of flux and contradiction. For Kroker & Kroker (1988)

human sexuality today is . . . driven onwards by a media-induced state of panic anxiety about the transmission of bodily fluids . . . and the disappearance of organic sex into discursive sexuality. (p. 14)

Although this paragraph is problematic in so far as it pre-supposes a somehow "organic" and "un-mediated" sexuality, it makes clear the panic surrounding bodily fluids. So what then do we make of such an image which shows the subject wearing his body fluids?

Firstly, this type of imagery seems to be reacting to the saccharine "safe sex" which has permeated the 1990's. Because the HIV virus is transferred via bodily fluids, the public externalising of the blood and urine name the site of the body. In images such as the man wearing his body fluids, the predetermined norm is aestheticised sexuality. As Kroker & Kroker (1988, p. 11) state "the intense fascination with sanitising the bodily fluids . . . is . . . a trompe-l'oeil deflecting the gaze from the actual existence of the contaminated body".


The need to deflect the gaze from the contaminated body can be seen as a direct implication of the AIDS virus. AIDS is a highly mediated “plague” and the sight of bodily fluids makes problematic any sealed binary oppositions between inside and outside, unclean and clean. As Sontag (1989) suggests “the marks on the face of a leper, a syphilitic, someone with AIDS are the signs of a progressive mutation, decomposition; something organic” (p. 41). Blood in particular has taken on dangerous cultural taboos to become renegade subject matter.

Andres Serrano has used contemporary social and cultural anxiety surrounding bodily fluids as the basis for many of his photographs. Serrano’s (1995) picture Semen and Blood III (refer to figure 2.15) mixes two body fluids which have been associated with the AIDS virus; semen and blood. In an age of AIDS, cultural taboos around blood have influenced the representation of sexuality, Serrano’s image blurs the line of bodily integrity and control by aestheticising body fluids.

As Serrano is mixing semen and blood, I would argue that there are different ideas at stake than abjection. For although the implication of AIDS has rendered semen as suspect, I see this photograph working within the parameters of mixing the sacred and the profane. Semen has not been considered abject in the same way that menstrual blood has. As Grosz (1994) has pointed out: “it is not the case that men’s bodily fluids are regarded as polluting and contaminating . . . as women’s” (p. 197).
Figure 2.15  *Semen and Blood III*

(Serrano, 1995, p. 55).
Figure 2.16 clearly demonstrates this paradox by implying the presence of seminal fluid in a playful way. Seminal fluids are here bound up with masculine desire and virility by association with the bedroom and the car show that is advertised. There is a television commercial which comes to mind that uses the presence of menstrual blood in an unconventional way, it is a film noir account of a woman cleaning up blood after she has committed a murder in order to obtain money. In this ad, the woman uses a sanitary napkin to wipe up the victim's blood before the police can see it. The police arrive and are "foiled" by this woman as she has cleared any evidence of the crime. Yet the location of menstruating woman with murder still clings to notions of female danger and violence.

The representation of menstruating women and the problematics of corporeality which permeated Henson's *Untitled 1983-84* series are far from solved in *Untitled 1994-95*. This is evident in the treatment of the photographs themselves which are cut and pasted in a deliberately jagged and random way. The absent parts of these photographs are Henson's "shadows", which point to the unfinished-ness of the pictures, their lack. So that there is qualities of a glance, but a fracturing of the gaze (refer to figure 2.17).
The 1996 Australian International Motor Show, Sydney Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. October 11th - 20th. Open 10am - 10pm Monday to Saturday, 10am - 7pm Sunday.

Figure 2.16 Advertisement for Darling Harbour Motor Show in Inside Sport October 1996.
Figure 2.17  *Untitled 1994-95*

(Henson, 1995, p. 53).
Figure 2.18  *Untitled 1994-95.*

(Henson, 1995, p. 43).
For Levin (cited in Burnett, 1995, p. 127) “what principally moves our eyes is the desire to know, and that knowledge is mastery and control”. Henson’s rupturing of the boundaries subverts viewer authority by displacing the subject/viewer and calling into question fixed readings of the photographs. This is brought to the reading process by Henson by the absent or incomplete frames and also through the representation of the abject body. The photographs solicit speculation of static reading systems. As Henson’s photographs have come under criticism for their use of the body, the contingency of the frame is useful. By highlighting the fluidity of the frame, meaning is deferred while a “reading” space within the image is negotiated.

Following Burnett (1995), I also see attempts to “master” a text as “confronted by a sliding away, a movement from the seen to the unseen and from recognition to confusion” (p. 127). In this model, the process of “reading” does not follow a linear regularity of subject - text - meaning, but is intercepted. For if Henson’s pictures are representing the abject as I have suggested, then the jagged and incomplete frames also suggest an inability to fully articulate this space. I suggest that this is working in Henson’s images as an erosion of static systems of representation, so that the frames are breaking down to reveal. In this way, the photographs in Untitled 1994-95 can be seen as exploring representational practices.
*Untitled 1994-95* is constructed in the twilight, again this is an ambiguous space which does not easily adhere to the polarity of binary oppositions. The opposition of day/night is made clear by Paglia (1995, p. 5):

> In the day we are social creatures, but at night we descend to the dream world where nature reigns, where there is no law but sex, cruelty and metamorphis. Day itself is invaded by daemonic night

Henson's pictures make use of the qualities of both day and night in using twilight to explore structures of day/night by blurring the polarities. This is evident for example in the treatment of male/female, where the sex and/or gender of the young couples is not easily determined. This creates a space for various readings of the text, as the flesh in the picture is not always particularly located. There is the opportunity to engage with the more ambiguous pictures from a "comfortable" space, yet the sexual scenes are ambiguous as a sexually fixed filtering gaze is absent. (refer to figures 2.19 & 2.20).

The enactment of this "story" within the Australian bushscape also marks an admission of and departure from the mythos which has surrounded the outback in many representations of Australia. The fractured, tortured rendition of the bush in Henson's *Untitled 1994-95* plays off the photographs of Sally Mann which I have so far used as a comparison. Although I see similarities in the treatment of subjectivity between *Immediate Family* and *Untitled 1994-95*, Mann shows the rural landscape as a majestic, beautiful, constant, feminised and maternal place (refer to figure 2.21). In contrast, Henson's nature is as fractured and ruptured as the subject which inhabits it (refer to figure 2.22).
Figure 2.19  *Untitled 1994-95*

(Henson, 1995, p. 42).
Figure 2.20  *Untitled 1994-95*

(Henson, 1995, p. 39).
Figure 2.21  *The Alligator's Approach*  
(Mann, 1992, p. 55).
Figure 2.22  *Untitled 1994-95*  
(Henson, 1995, p. 36).
I do not wish at this point to shift to an argument of Henson’s pictures being about Australian nationalism. For if the work relied on discursive norms about a particular Australian context, this would then raise problems as to why Henson is well received internationally. Nevertheless, Henson’s use of outback mythology as being a place both of freedom and destruction, works within a paradigm which has traditionally seen the Australian outback as “a threat as well as a promise”. (Turner, 1993, p. 26)

Once again then, attempts to nail down any inherent meaning of Henson’s photographs, are met with the nebulous and unresolved issues of binary oppositions. These photographs encompass both culture and nature, male and female, light and dark, mind and body, pleasure and horror. The ambiguity of the pictures lies in the porous nature of the imagery, which mixes the binary oppositions without privileging any particular position of the dualities. This provides a space in which unpredictable meanings can arise, where the bodies in the pictures can move away from being either male or female, either violent or sensual, either desiring or desirable. The space of the photographs eludes such classification, such spirals of pleasure and power by resisting the dualisms of body/mind.

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2 See Turner (1993) for a discussion of the status of the Australian outback within Australian Narrative. Similarly, Milner (1994) makes several interesting points on an “apocalyptic” tendency in representations of Australia. According to Milner, Australia “has suffered from . . . [a] sense of itself as unusually exposed to the threat of invasion and extinction” (p. 201). The extent to which these assumptions of the bush have entered the psyche of Australian representational practices is succinctly put by Gibson (1993) who suggests that “hardly any of us ever see the never, never, but we all know it’s out there, behind our backs” (p. 212).
There is of course a counter argument to the claims that I have made about these images as there are several contradictions and apparent limitations evident in the work. For the pictures are set in the *natural* environment of the Australian bush and they also represent only young, sexualised, anglo-celtic bodies. My interpretation of these photographs does not then claim in any way that they are outside of these restrictions. Yet I would argue that these issues are addressed in the photographs and called into question.

Henson's photographs question the idea of an authentic or natural site. This is achieved with the cutting and pasting of the bushscape onto the image, which makes problematic any attempt to read the landscape as a somehow more "real" space as the pasting of the landscape undercuts any attempt to read it in this way. The landscape is also littered with the debris of rusted, broken cars which also highlights the cultural in the landscape and onto the bodies. Any attempt to read the landscape in metaphysical terms is problematised by these issues. Similarly, the rusty cultural artefacts in referencing the social inhibit reading the body as a naturalised, purely biological site.
The rusted cars implicate western culture and western bodies. For if we can understand Paglia's (1995) text as a tale of western anxiety of the Dionysian, then the textual frisson of the pasting of the elements, the blurring of the binaries, signifies the recognition of body and mind as interrelated vehicles of meaning(s).

The body is cultural, it has meaning only in relation to the knowledges from which we can construct and understand it through. With regard to Bill Henson's photographs, the meanings which are constructed around the body are mapped on either side of a binary divide. Yet as I have argued, the ambiguation of the binary divide, which is achieved through the representation of abjection reveals a different or more productive way of interpreting the photographs and than relegating them to the art/exploitation divide.

These pictures can be seen as constructing what Grosz (1994, p. 24) has suggested is needed "to be able to talk of the body outside or in excess of binary pairs". For Grosz, such a position would provide a point of mediation:

> between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point to rethink the opposition between the inside and outside, the private and the public, the self and the other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition. (Grosz, 1994, pp. 20-21)

In highlighting the abject, Henson's photographs demonstrate the *between* of the oppositions. In this way, the photographs challenge subjectivity by refusing to privilege mind over body or showing the body as an autonomous site. Instead, these pictures embrace all of the contradictions which are inherent in the dichotomous spaces and literally "sticks" them together so that the process of incorporating mind/body or culture/nature is not normalised as it could be in a seamless representation. Henson's pictures remain self-reflexive in the attempt to make this space visible.
Conclusion

That Bill Henson's photographs embrace contradictions still leaves them somewhat "missing in the shadows". My reflections on these pictures provides only an account of how they could be read rather than a sealed conclusion. By focusing on abjection, I have called into question traditions which still echo in our readings of texts through the adherence to binary modes of thought.

In doing so, I have not argued for a "correct" way to interpret Bill Henson's photographs, I have rather made note of an interpretive model of the body which allows for the ambiguation of binary oppositions. My goal was not to provide sealed conclusions as this would undercut the very thing I have been arguing for; that interpretations of photographs should be fluid and excessive, rather than moored in the semiotic moment. My account of abjection and projection as a "model" then is best understood within Grosz's (1994) description of the function of a model as:

a heuristic device which facilitates a certain understanding, highlighting certain features while diminishing the significance of other; it is a selective rewriting of a situation whose complexity entails the possibility of other, alternative models, models which highlight different features, presenting different emphases. (p. 209)

In examining Henson's photographs, I am not submitting that they in any way encompass a definitive account of either the mind or the body. In trying to suggest other ways to consider the represented bodies in these pictures, I am questioning any given or sealed conclusion as to what the photographs may or may not mean.
The introduction to this research began with the problem of reading texts such as Henson's outside of the binary divides within which they are dominantly circulated. In looking at methodologies, I suggested that existing frameworks lacked the fluidity which I saw as necessary to achieve this aim. The model which I saw as more useful was a bricolage of unresolved positions which had sought in one way or another to embody subjectivity.

In chapter one, I began by exploring textualites of bodies by looking at bodily discipline. Here I argued that the discourses of diet and body management could be expressly linked with "deviant" imagery through a Foucauldian framework which posits the body as a text unto which subjectivity is inscribed. I then proceeded to examine Roland Barthes' (1993) phenomenological approach to textual analysis in *Camera Lucida* and explored the way in which the body is theorised from "the inside out". The model I saw as most useful for responding to photographs, was to consider the body not as "either" a text or a vehicle of private response, but as a "strip" which allows for the recognition of a contingent self which is overwritten with the social.

In the second chapter, I addressed the way in which representations of discipline and the body have clustered around the use of women's bodies and the inclusion or exclusion of bodily fluids. Comparing Henson to Sally Mann, I argued that both of these photographers represent the body as abject which renders subjectivity as contingent. I then outlined the way in which I perceive Henson has destabilised binary oppositions in his *Untitled 1994-95* series with the inclusion of body fluids, the ambiguation of sexuality and a fracturing of the frame.
Necessarily, these issues of embodiment, readerships and photography ultimately end with the writer of this research, with the “I” who has struggled with meaning. Interpretation of this work has of course been my “projection”. In many ways, a focus on the contingent has both threaded this work and also paralleled the way in which I feel part of a larger social environment and also a “self”. This tension foregrounds in debates of public and private, abstract and concrete. No one classification of gender, class or race fully incorporates the “I” that looks at pictures and attempts to make sense of them. Feminism, as it moved to feminism(s) for example has shown that such categories are simply insufficient.

Generally, this paper has raised many more questions than it could hope to answer. It also has its own inclusions and exclusions. A necessity for a certain focus has highlighted certain aspects but left others underdeveloped. Issues such as production, circulation and distribution are clearly relevant yet beyond the scope of this particular inquiry, and remain areas of potential investigation. Specifically, I have hoped to push the borders of the paradigm of photographic inquiry as I am interested not only in how photographs construct truth or reality, but also in how they give us pleasure. Clearly, there is much work to be done.
Bibliography


