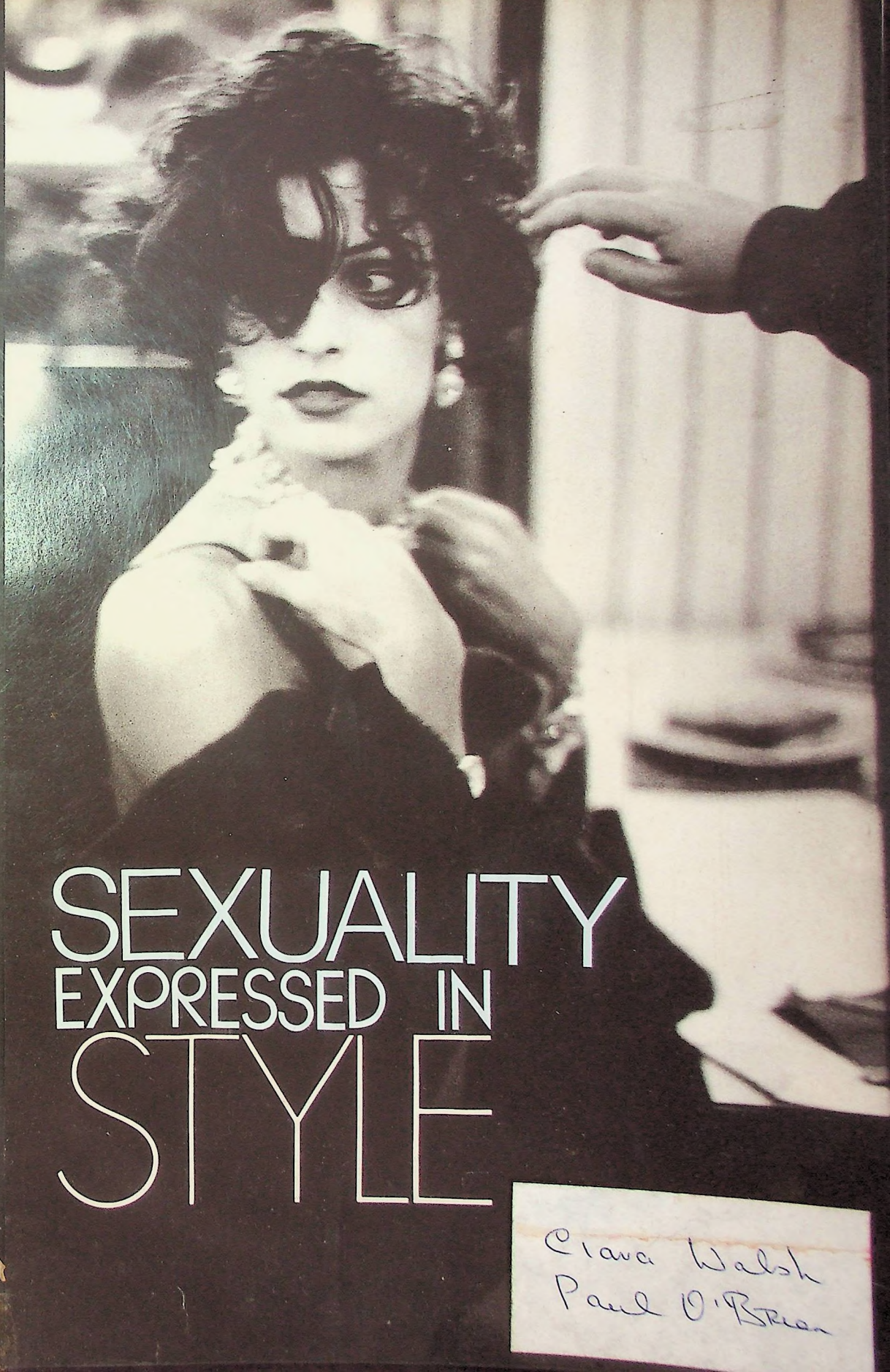
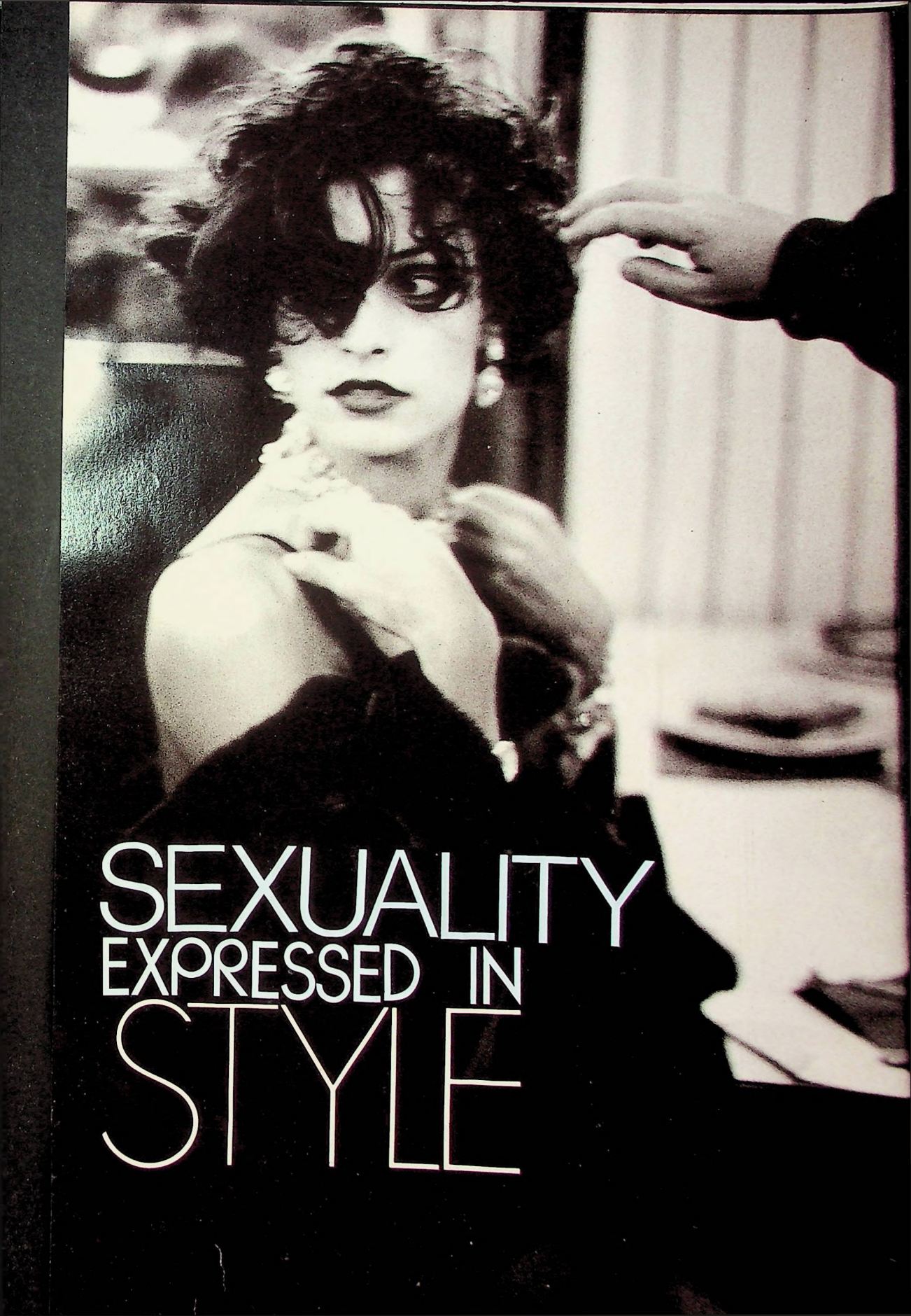


SEXUALITY EXPRESSED IN STYLE

Clara Walsh
Paul O'Brien


SEXUALITY
EXPRESSED IN
STYLE

SEXUALITY EXPRESSED IN STYLE

by

CIARA WALSH

4TH YEAR FASHION
1991.

CONTENTS

Sex is an either/or phenomonen - appealing or appalling, rarely in between.(1) Murray S. Davis.

The more expert we become in talking about sexuality, the greater the difficulties we seem to encounter in trying to understand it. Despite sustained attempts over many years to 'demystify' sex, and several decades of much proclaimed - or condemned - 'liberalism' and 'permissiveness', the erotic still arouses acute moral anxiety and confusion. This is not because sex is intrinsically 'naughty', as a sensitive commentator has rightly remarked, but 'because it is a focus of powerful feelings'.(2) The strong emotions it undoubtedly arouses give to the world of sexuality a seismic sensitivity making it a transmission belt for a wide variety of needs and desires: for love and anger, tenderness and aggression, intimacy and adventure, romance and predatoriness, pleasure and pain, empathy and power. We experience sex very subjectively.

At the same time, the very mobility of sexuality, its cameleon-like ability to take many guises and forms, so that what for one might be a source of warmth and attraction, for another might be one of fear and hate, makes it a peculiarly sensitive conductor of cultural influences and hence of social and political divisions. Not surprisingly therefore, especially during the past century, sexuality has become the focus of fierce ethical and political divisions: between traditional moralists (of various religious hues, or of none) and liberals, between high priests of sexual restraint and the advocates of sexual liberation between the defenders of male privilege and those such as feminists who

challenged it, and between the forces of moral regulation and a host of radical sexual oppositions some of whom attack one another as much as they oppose sexual orthodoxy.

How are we to negotiate our way through the maze that apparently constitutes 'sexuality'?

Let us start with the term 'sex' and its common uses. Its very ambiguity signals the difficulty. We learn very early on from many sources that 'natural' sex is what takes place with members of the 'opposite sex'. 'Sex' between people of 'same sex' is therefore, by definition, 'unnatural'. So much is taken for granted. But the multiple meaning of the word 'sex' should alert us to the real complexity of the question. The term refers both to an act and a category of person, to a practice and to a gender. Modern culture has assumed an intimate connection between the fact of being biologically male or female (that is, having appropriate sex organs and reproductive potentialities) and the correct form of erotic behaviour (usually genital intercourse between men and women). The dominant meaning to-day refers to physical relations between the sexes, 'to have sex'. The extension of the meanings of these words indicates a shift in the way that 'sexuality' (the abstract noun referring to the quality of being 'sexual') is understood in our culture.

The social processes through which this has taken place are complex but the implications are clear, for they are the ones we still live with. In the first place, there is an assumption of a sharp distinction between 'the sexes', a dichotomy of interests, even an antagonism ('the battle of the sexes') which can only be precariously bridged. Men are men and women are women - and rarely the twain shall

meet. But secondly, there is a belief that 'sex' is an overpowering natural force, a 'biological imperative' mysteriously located in the genitals (especially in the wayward male organs) that sweeps all before it (at least if you are male) like hamlets before an avalanche and that somehow bridges this divide, like a rainbow over a chasm. Thirdly, this gives rise to a pyramidical model of sex, to a sexual hierarchy stretching downward from the apparently Nature-endowed correctness of heterosexual genital intercourse to the bizarre manifestations of 'the perverse', hopefully safely buried at the base but unfortunately always erupting in dubious places.

This view of the world of sex is deeply embedded in our culture, part of the air that we breathe. It provides an idealogical justification for the uncontrollable male lust, and even therefore, for the fact of rape, for the downgrading of female sexual anatomy, and for the way we treat those sexual minorities who are different from ourselves as well as for the more acceptable verities of love, relationships and security.

The meanings we give to 'sexuality' are socially organised, sustained by a variety of languages, which seek to tell us what sex is, what it ought to be - and what it could be. Existing languages of sex, embedded in moral treaties, laws, educational practices, psychological theories, medical definitions, social rituals, pornographic or romantic fictions, popular music, advertising, and common sense assumptions (most of which disagree) set the horizon of the possible. They all present themselves as true representations of our intimate needs and desires.

The emergence of new social movements concerned with sex - modern feminism, the gay and lesbian and other radical sexual movements - have challenged many of the certainties of the 'sexual tradition', and have

offered new insights into the intricate forms of power and domination that shape our sexual lives. The politics of homosexuality have placed on the agenda questions about sexual preference, identity, and choice. The Womens Movement has forced a recognition of the multiple forms of female sexual subordination, from endemic male violence and misogyny to sexual harassment and a pervasive language of sexual denigration and abuse. It has demanded a recognition of womens' rights over their own bodies by re-posing questions about consent and reproductive rights, desire and pleasure. Again there are as many questions posed as answers given. Differences have emerged between men and women, homosexuals and heterosexuals, blacks and whites. No acceptable codes of appropriate behaviour have been elaborated despite all the heated debates. But we are being forced to re-think what we understand by sexuality because of a growing awareness of the tangled web of influences and forces - economics, race, gender, morals - that shape our emotions, needs, desires and relationships.

Over the last decade or so much has changed, sometimes dramatically. There has been a minor explosion of historical writings about sex. We now know a great deal about such topics as marriage and the family, prostitution and homosexuality, the forms of legal and medical regulation, pre-Christian and non-Christian moral codes, women's bodies and health, illegitimacy and birth control, rape and sexual violence, the evolution of sexual identities and the importance of social networks and oppositional sexualities.

What connects these activities that we have conventionally designated as sexual? What is the magic element that defines some things as sexual and others not? Was there once an Eden of sexual egalitarianism before the 'world historical defeat of the female sex', or was patriarchal

domination present from the dawn of culture?

The commonly used term 'the social construction of sexuality' has a harsh and mechanistic sound. But at its heart is a quite straightforward concern, with 'the intricate multiple ways in which our emotions, desires and relationships are shaped by the society we live in'. (3)

In practice, most writers on our sexual past assume that sex is an irresistible natural energy, barely held in check by a thin crust of civilisation. But against this assumption, is sexuality not shaped by social forces? And far from being the most natural element in social life, the most resistant cultural moulding, it is perhaps one of the most susceptable to organisation. Indeed, one may go as far as to say that sexuality only exists through its social forms and social organisation. Moreover, the forces that shape and mould the erotic possibilities of the body vary from society to society. 'Sexual socialisation', Ellen Ross and Rayner Rapp have written, 'is no less specific to each culture than is socialisation to ritual, dress or cuisine'. (4) This puts the emphasis on society and social relations rather than on nature.

Biology conditions and limits what is possible. But it does not cause the patterns of sexual life. We cannot reduce human behaviour to the mysterious workings of DNA. Instead we may see in biology a set of potentialities which are given meaning only in social relationships.

We may learn to see sexuality as something which society produces in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate, and those who resist. Sexuality is not given, it is a product of negot-

iation, struggle and human agency.

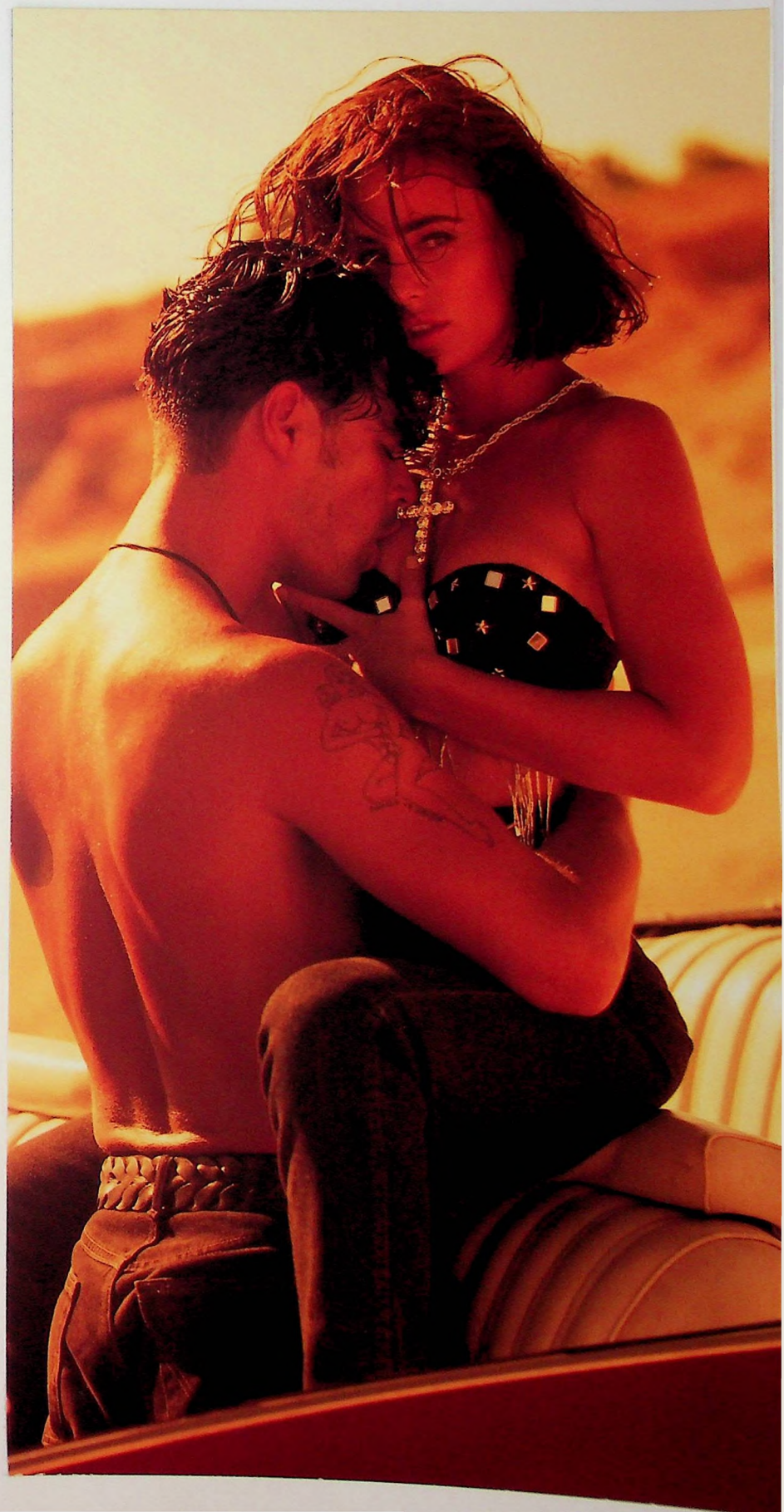
Both the significance attributed to sexuality and attitudes to the various manifestations of erotic life vary enormously. Some societies display so little interest in erotic activity that they have been labelled more or less 'asexual'.

Within wide parameters of general cultural attitudes, each culture labels different practices as appropriate or inappropriate, moral or immoral, healthy or perverted. For instance, there are usually different rules for men and women, shaped in ways to subordinate women's sexuality to men's. These rules are often more acceptable as abstract norms than as practical guides. But they provide the permissions, prohibitions, limits and possibilities through which erotic life is constructed.

To understand sexuality we have to understand much more than sex: we have to understand the relationship in which most of it takes place. The growing involvement of married women in the pay work force of the 1950s and 1960s inevitably affected the patterns of domestic life. It also fuelled a consumer boom which provided one of the pre-conditions for a proliferation of new markets for sexual commodities in the past generation.

As often as not sexual life is altered by the unintended consequences of social action. Laws banning obscene publications more often than not give rise to court cases that publicise them. Banning sexy films gives them the fame they might not otherwise deserve. More seriously, laws designed to control the behaviour of certain groups of people can actually give rise to an enhanced sense of identity and cohesion amongst them.

But it is not only formal methods which shape sexuality:



there are many informal and customary patterns which are equally important. A language of sexual abuse ('slags' and 'sluts') works to keep girls in line, and to enforce conventional distinctions between girls who do and girls who don't. Such informal methods often produce various bizarre manifestations of sexual behaviour. We may find the exotic phenomenon of petting, which is dependent on the belief that while intercourse in public is tabooed, other forms of play, because they are not defined as 'the sex act', may be intimately engaged in.

A quick flick through a glossy magazine will reveal images of lust and passion, bodies entwined, heads thrown back in wanton abandon. Acres of magazine space and millions of pounds worth of glossy advertising are dedicated to it, we are all affected by it in our daily lives.

According to the agony aunts and beauty pages, if we don't have sex appeal we can create it - by wearing the right clothes, make-up and perfumes. Leggy blondes and muscular Adonises are said to 'have it', while scholarly, ascetic types and rotund matrons don't usually possess 'it' to any significant degree.

More often than not we receive these images without question. They are assimilated into our subliminal and set the norm for the acceptable.

In the cities in which we live, all of us see hundreds of publicity images every day of our lives. No other image confronts us so frequently.

In no other form of society in history has there been such a concentration of images, such a density of visual messages.

One may remember to forget these messages but briefly one takes them

HALTER TOP: SWANKY MODES. STOLE: ANTHONY PRICE.
EARRINGS: MONTY DON. GLOVES: ANGUSKA HEMPEL

Nº7

Nº7 PRODUCTS ARE NOT
TESTED ON ANIMALS


MBERTO GINOCCHIETTI

in, and for a moment they stimulate the imagination by way of either memory or expectation. The publicity image belongs to the moment. We see it as we turn a page, as we turn a corner, as a vehicle passes us. Publicity images also belong to the moment in the same sense that they must be continually renewed and made up-to-date. Yet they never speak of the present. Often they refer to the past and always they speak of the future.

We are now so accustomed to being addressed by these images that we scarcely notice their total impact. A person may notice a particular image or piece of information because it corresponds to some particular interest he has. But we accept the total system of publicity images as we accept an element of climate.

Publicity is usually explained and justified as a competitive medium which ultimately benefits the public (the consumer) and the most efficient manufacturers - and thus the national economy. It is closely related to certain ideas about freedom: freedom of choice for the purchaser: freedom of enterprise for the manufacturer. The great hoardings and the publicity neons of the cities of capitalism are the immediate visible signs of 'The Free World'.

However, publicity is not merely an assembly of competing messages: it is a language in itself which is always being used to make the same general proposal. Within publicity, choices are offered between this cream and that cream, that shoe and this shoe, but publicity as a system only makes a single proposal.

It proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more.

This more, it proposes will make us in some way richer - even though we will be poorer by having spent our money.

Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people

who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is a process of manufacturing glamour.

The Spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself. One could put this another way: the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product.

Publicity increasingly uses sexuality to sell any product or service. But this sexuality is never free in itself; it is a symbol for something presumed to be larger than it: the good life in which you can buy whatever you want. To be able to buy is the same thing as being sexually desirable; occasionally this is the explicit message of publicity. Usually it is the implicit message, i.e., if you are able to buy this product you will be lovable. If you cannot buy it you will be less lovable. 'With this product you "will" become desirable. In these surroundings all your relationships "will" become happy and radiant'. No where is this message more apparent than in the images of fashion advertising.

Publicity speaks in the future tense and yet the achievement of this future is endlessly deferred. How then does publicity remain credible - or credible enough to exert the influence it does? It remains credible because the truthfulness of publicity is judged, not by the real fulfilment of its promises, but by the relevance of its fantasies to those of the Spectator-buyer. Its essential application is not to reality but to day to day dreams.

To a large extent the dissemination of information which reaches the consumer about fashion and what is fashionable is achieved through visual images. Photographic images are a representation of the real object but are used in such a way as to manipulate reality. To the designer, how their garment appears in a fashion feature in a magazine can be crucial, although it is not in their control. A media spotlight can lead to an increase in sales and can build or break reputations. Despite its importance and abundance, fashion photography is considered the poor relation to photo-journalism, merely worthy of a flick through the pages of Vogue in a dentist's waiting room. On the other hand, coffee-table books such as Helmut Newton's 'Sleepless Nights' have elevated fashion photography to a level of a titillating art form. At its most basic level, fashion photography is a form of advertising for retail stores, designers, and businesses. On another level it represents the meaning of clothes in different contexts - shapes and cuts of garments, movements, garments in relation to human proportions, narrative, emblematic, nostalgic or erotic. Varying techniques of fashion photography often illustrate contradictory moods for similar garments. Thus the received impressions of fashion photography, whether on the part of the consumer or the designer, may differ radically according to the representation such as glossy colour, black and white, hard and soft prints.

Originally the basic purpose of fashion photography was to illustrate and sell clothes - advertising at its simplest and most direct. But over the years the basic requirement has been transformed into a subtle and complex operation that involves art, talent, technique, psychology, and salesmanship. To achieve its goal it needs to seduce the viewer into a world of glamour and illusion, and in seeking to attain this it has chronicled and energised fashion, providing us with not only a visual

history of twentieth century fashion but also a vivid and lucid history of the images twentieth century women (and men) have aspired and related to.

What is it about fashion photography that is so absorbingly seductive? Fashion photography has always and almost exclusively been about and directed at women, but the images have almost always been created and controlled by men, and as such are inevitably suspect from a feminist perspective. On the negative side, this implies that fashion photography has been insidiously and exclusively manipulative, a powerfully and potentially frightening kind of brainwashing, conditioning of ephemeral ends and misplaced values. In this respect the part that women fashion photographers play is obviously vitally important. If they choose to compete with men on their own ground (as several perhaps surprisingly do) the result, as in other fields, is even more aggressively masculine. On the other hand, a purely feminine approach (without attempts to emulate her male counterpart) can surely add another dimension to the field, giving it a new authenticity and validity.

The creation of fashion photography somehow precludes reality; it calls for the invention of its own world. "Photography is credible," says David Bailey, "we believe it is telling the truth, even when we should know better. This is why I find photographs which depict what is obviously unreal so fascinating. We are no longer conditioned to expect painting to deal with reality, but photographs that enter the forbidden territory have a kind of subversive edge." (5)

However, although a fashion photographer may have his/her greatest success within this field, it is often their other work, be it portrait-

ure, documentary, or otherwise that enriches and gives greater depth to their fashion work (for example, Cecil Beaton).

A complaint often levelled at fashion photography is that it does not fulfill its function and clearly depict and illustrate the clothes. This is where fashion photography breaks with commercial advertising and creates more than a realistic image of the object or garment. A fashion photograph does not represent reality, despite the fact that the photograph is generally considered documentary, a representation of something - a moment - that existed. A fashion photograph is not a statement of fact; it is an ideal, not commonplace with reality but a created illusion. Although we all accept it as such, the medium works as a potent selling device, because subjectively people are willing to believe in the possibility of the existence that it depicts.

Fashion photography has suffered a great deal of criticism in its time: some justified, much unjustified, and little that cannot be aimed at fashion itself. The double stigma of commercialism and materialism which it has in common with straightforward advertising photography, makes it one of the few types of photography whose values are questioned, motives suspected, and aims despised. Its production for purely commercial purposes, despite its 'artistic' pretensions, implies creative manipulation and sacrifice of artistic integrity.

However, the fashion photographer has a different role to that of the advertising photographer. Although the aim is ostensibly the same- to sell the product, the clothes - he or she is not usually employed by the manufacturer of the garments but by a third party, usually a magazine. Therefore, he or she has far more room to manoeuvre, the magazine's constraints being a great deal less restrictive than the individual manufacturer's. The photographer is consequently able to exercise

individual artistic talents to a far greater extent. In this respect, he or she is limited only by the fashion editor or art director they are responsible to for each particular session. The quality of fashion photography over the years has thus been as much in the hands of the far-sighted and experimentally-minded editors and directors as in the hands of the individual photographer - or even more so. Indeed, the reputations of many magazines depend on the quality of the fashion photography published under the reign of individual editors, Diane Vreeland for Vogue in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s is perhaps the best known example.

Various fashions may be acclaimed or derided, but the demand for new and different clothing is continuous. The public is not quite as easily manipulated as fashion critics would have us believe, and surely fashion's one sustaining feature is that clothing is a necessity, and one (like food and drink) whose qualities and refinements are appreciated by the large majority of people. It is a sensual appreciation and possibly self indulgent, but nonetheless necessary. Fashion design unquestionably has its own artistic devices: colour, proportion, spatial relationships, balance, and texture of fabrics being not the least of its aesthetic qualities. The same applies to its representation through photography. Fashion photography presents a seductive suggestion and requires the viewer to aspire to an ideal, even if the ideal represents an unashamed portrayal of luxurious clothes, extravagant living, and exceptional beauty far beyond the realisation of most spectators.

The consciously persuasive element - the manipulated identification of the viewer with the image, true of all commercial photography - may be one of the least attractive elements of fashion photography; but all of these negative aspects ignore its

aesthetic validity. The best individual fashion photographs serve as works of art in their own right, quite apart from their fashion content.

The fundamental purpose of fashion photography and its raison d'être, the portrayal of fashion, may be almost incidental as far as the quality of a photograph and therefore its worth in terms of being recorded for posterity are concerned. However, the fashion content of the photograph should never be overlooked or underestimated, because although in the future today's fashion photography may be judged by different criteria, to-day it depends entirely on the successful and seductive representation of tomorrow's fashion, and that is what will decide whether it is remembered in the future. The fashion photograph cannot rely on the straightforward depiction of fashion; photography being a two dimensional representation on paper, is limited in terms of representing the tactile sensuousness of three dimensional clothing.

Long before the invention of photography, the language of dress and adornment had grown to a richly varied sign system, transcending the notion that clothes evolved solely to protect us from extremes of temperature, or as a token of modesty. The way we perceive ourselves continues to depend on these outward signs, which generally precede

speech or touch as a means of communication, announcing our character or values. Fashion photography demonstrably has a place in the analysis of the sign-language of dress, and a direct relationship with the diverse cultural codes reflected in the ways in which our bodies are presented, and represented.

Inherently associated with external appearances, fashion photographs, through their concern with pose and gesture function equally as a form of anthropology. They document style - that is, self expression. Dress is one constituent, but style equally holds social, political and psychological meanings.

Within the surfeit of fashion photographs, there is a small portion which might warrant closer attention. The evidence is in the work of those photographers who have refused to be proscribed, who, while they recorded fashions, defied imposed limitations and insisted on going deeper. In fact the obsessions of the leading fashion photographers tend not to be with costume at all: they have coerced their medium into becoming a vehicle only marginally related to the need to sell a dress. As Susan Sontag recognised: 'the greatest fashion photography is more than the photograph of fashion'. (6)

Fashion photographs are made, almost exclusively, for publication in magazines. By the late nineteenth century the expansion of the middle classes had enabled womens magazines, intended at first to instruct leisured society in matters of taste and decorum, to grow into a mass market industry. But only recently have mens fashion magazines become commercially viable.

George Hoyningen-Huene introduced men into his photographs of women's fashions in the late Twenties: though they play passive roles the hint of sex was considered daring at the time. The idea

was pushed further (for example by Richard Avedon, Bob Richardson, and Helmut Newton) in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was not until the late 1970s, and Bruce Weber's photographs for GQ, that men's fashion photography overcame its inhibitions and embraced male sexuality. For the most part though, photographs of male fashions rarely strayed from narrow orthodoxy.

The earliest commercial fashion photographs date back to around 1890. Few of the pioneer efforts attempted more than a literal description of a garment, which was invariably displayed on a static, mannequin-like figure. But from the moment photographers switched their pre-occupations to the pose and expression of their models, they exceeded the normal brief of providing a record, an illustration. Fashion photography began to appreciate that it could comment on, as well as reflect, its subject matter.

At the point when the fashion photographer is engaged by the psychological and physical character of the person inside the garment, then clearly the psychology of the photographer is at least equally involved in the transaction. Where previously formal values or less readily defined qualities such as 'elegance' and 'glamour', had been paramount, the shifts in fashion photography after 1945 are due principally to the increased awareness of its psychological dimension.

The implications are clear in a comparison of images from the pre and post-war periods. Jean Moral's 1932 photograph of Lillian Farley, and Bob Richardson's 1964 photograph of Jill Kennington, were chosen for their apparent similarities. They were made for publication in the same magazine - Harper's Bazaar: both, incid-

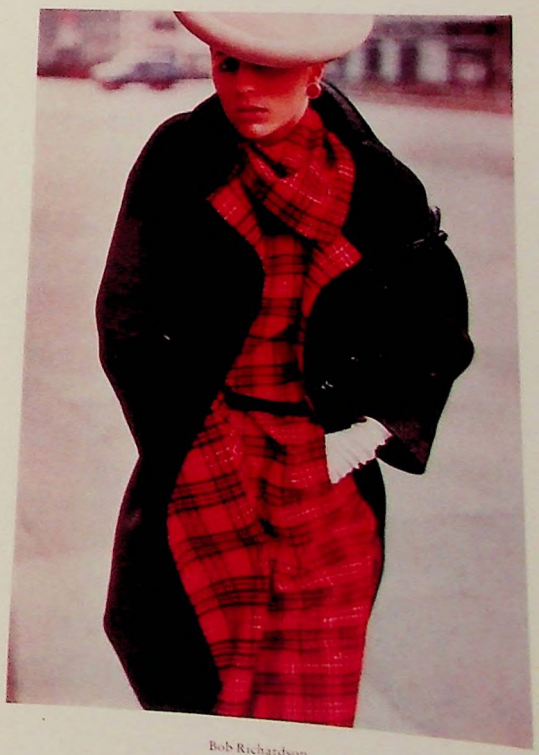
JEAN MORAL:

Unpublished photograph for Harper's Bazaar, 1932.

Jean Moral
Unpublished photograph for *Harper's Bazaar*, 1932

BOB RICHARDSON:

Harper's Bazaar Sept. 1964.



Bob Richardson
Harper's Bazaar, September 1964
Fashion: Ben Reig; hat – Lilly Dache

entally, illustrate the fashion very clearly and the clothes and accessories in each are broadly the same - a coat, dress, gloves, hat, handbag and earrings. The photographs are graphically quite simple - the woman dominates the space and is shown in relatively sharp-focus against a background which is thrown out-of-focus. Both are photographed on the move and on the street. (Jean Moral's picture, it should be noted, is one of the first instances of fashion being shot in this way).

While Moral and Richardson are, superficially, similar in many respects, the ways the differ are more marked. We read from these photographs that both women are walking. Moral has Lillian Farley striding across (and out of) the frame: there is no eye contact, whereas Jill Kennington walks directly towards the viewer, the direct engagement further emphasised by the way the picture is cropped through the hat and the knee, concentrating our attention on the woman. Jean Moral's picture is an attractive and atmospheric record of an elegant woman, walking her dog in Paris: it fulfils its task of recording fashion admirably - but that is all.

In contrast, while Bob Richardson, too, illustrates the clothes with precision, he has 'extra curricular' motivations. His concern is really with gesture, and especially, in this photograph, with gestures of considerable ambiguity. We know, from all the folds in the lower half of the dress, that the woman is walking towards us, confronting the viewer, but her shoulders slope round in a simultaneous gesture of recoil, of defensiveness. Nothing in this deceptively simple shot is as it first appears. One eye gazes directly at the camera (spectator), but the hat is brought forward so that one eye is hidden. The light coloured hat is a visual

link to the whiteness of the one visible glove. The gloved hand slides into a pocket, it serves to support the handbag, which, in slipping from the shoulder is further generating instability. The unseen hands and the glaring whiteness of the glove affirm the body language the woman presents, both stressing her sexuality (by literally pointing to it) and protecting it.

The photograph explores vulnerability, expressed by what amounts to an almost adolescent gesture of hugging oneself, of advance and withdrawal. Sexuality is inherent to some degree in all fashion photographs; after 1945 it is no longer incidental, it becomes central. In recognising and working with this, photographers like Bob Richardson chartered new ground for fashion photography.

As fashion photography became highly professionalised, it entered concurrently into a more serious and in some ways a more thoughtful phase. This new era gave rise to the paradox of fashion phtographs, at their most intelligent and compelling, operating at a level which may be beyond the requirements of those who commission them.

Some photographers find challenging the conventions of what is permissible within the pages of a fashion magazine a spur to the imagination. David Bailey has described how Helmut Newton viewed Vogue's editorial policy as a version of Hollywood's Hays Office: the moral codes they imposed provided grounds for subtle retaliatory provocation, bypassing censorship. Newton both embraces and

acknowledges the importance of the fashion magazine for the development of his photography: 'I seem to need this kind of discipline and definite framework in which to work.... I find the editorial page acts for me as a kind of "think tank" or laboratory to try out new ideas'.(7)

Fashion's photographs are designed to be seducers, propaganda so potent it can beguile us into buying the most frivolous products.

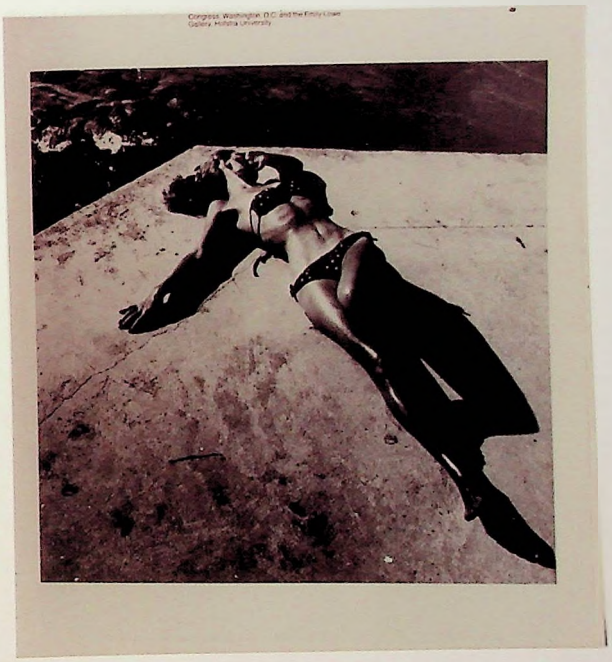
In 1947 in Toni Frissell's shot of one of the first bikinis we are drawn to the sexiness of the model and the skimpiness of the bikini. Because of the unusual camera angle (interlocking diagonals with low angle and use of a short lens) the body seems to be thrown forward in a highly ambiguous space, as if it were displayed on a serving tray for our delectation.

Richard Avedon has been consistently important in conveying social truths through photography. During the 'sexual revolution' of the 60s his fashion work had more to tell us about our behaviour and belief than many other socially-minded modes. In the early 60s Avedon's depiction of Princess Christina Paolozzi bare breasted created a furore. A daring photo-essay for the January 1965 issue of Harper's Bazaar presented even more advanced ideas of sexuality in the 60s. Here two raven haired beauties, twins, and one suave male, form a menage a trois on vacation in a seductive play on popular fantasy.

The menage a trois entered the popular vocabulary of fashion photography. Avedon repeated it with significant updating in the

Toni Frissell:

Reproduced in Harper's Bazaar, May 1947. P.162.



RICHARD AVEDON:
Harper's Bazaar January 1965.

May 1974 issue of Vogue. His photograph showed a model clad in a bikini bottom, lounging seductively on a beach with two male playmates. A purse spray of Lanvin perfume, the item featured in the shots, was carelessly tucked in her suit. Thus by 1975 when Helmut Newton also interpreted the theme for Vogue, it was hardly new (or seemingly shocking) subject matter. Yet, the public was outraged: while Avedon's work had shown a tantalising possibility, Newton's work seemed promiscuous. Cries of protest were expressed and Vogue, hardly the sexual forerunner (of magazines) at this point, was rumoured to have suffered cancelled subscriptions.

In 1962 David Bailey had begun photographing model Jean Shrimpton standing, walking, and sitting in direct poses which involved no distancing between either photographer and model or model and audience. This in itself was unremarkable considering Avedon's earlier innovations in the same direction, but the directness of the confrontation and the fascination of Shrimpton and Bailey's personal and professional relationship, particularly its sexual overtones, gave these pictures amazingly wide appeal. Taking fashion photographs was, according to Bailey, '...a most definitely sexual thing. The only thing between you and the girl is the camera. A three legged phallus'.(8)

The foundation for the treatment of fashion in photography of the 70s was laid by the imagery of the preceding decade, particularly the sexual emancipation of Avedon's work of the 60s. The brilliant and sensitive use of nudity and sexual innuendo which Avedon introduced in fashion depiction of the 60s had by the 70s lost its shock value and, in much work other than Avedon's, its subtlety.

Since fashion photography is intended to create interest in its subject, new ways of creating memorable material had to be found. In fashion photography, as in Hollywood, there were few dreams and no glamour left in mere elegance. Fashion photography of the 70s thus turned to forms of sexual expression attracting attention - homosexuality, transvestitism, as well as voyeurism, murder, and rape.

Critic Hilton Kramer has aptly defined one of the central issues of contemporary fashion photography as the evolution of fashion into a sub-division of pornographic culture 'with some photographs indistinguishable from an interest in murder, pornography and terror'.(9)

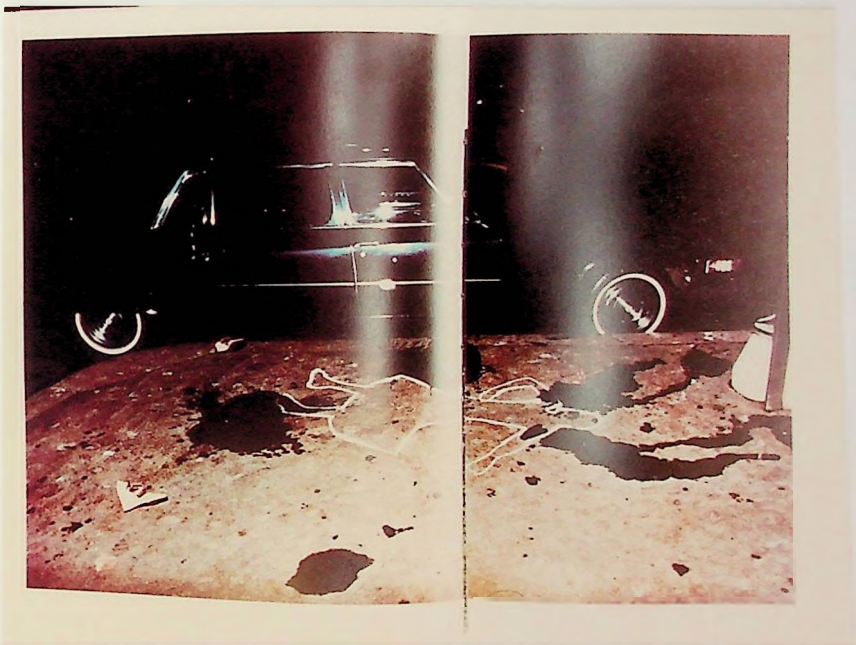
The new brands of fashion photography may supply the viewer with the fantasy fulfilment unavailable to him in everyday life. In fashion photography the fantasy is often sexual, linking sex and violence.

Ernestine Carter, who had charged Sarah Moon with ushering an era of decadence, claimed that 'Pornography, having taken over films, the theatre, and literature, took over fashion photography too.'(10) Besides Sarah Moon, Carter identified Helmut Newton and Deborah Turbeville as 'leading protagonists' in this movement, omitting to name the decade's other most controversial figures, Guy Bourdin and Chris von Wangenheim.

Except in the most general way fashion photography was seldom discussed in the public domain before the 1970s. In May 1975 American Vogue thrust the content of specific photographs into wide debate. Helmut Newton's photographs of Lisa Taylor in 'The Story of Ohhh', and Deborah Turbeville's Bath-house series

Guy Bourdin:

Charles Jourdan Shoe Advertisement
Reproduced in French Vogue, Spring/Summer 1975



shocked American readers: 'People started talking about Auschwitz and lesbians and drugs,' recalled Turbeville, and all I was doing was trying to design five figures in space.'(11) But Newton, though surprised at the degree of the reaction to his photographs, admits, 'We really whacked it down the throats of readers at the time.' (12) Guy Bourdin's advertisement for Charles Jourdan shoes,showing the chalked outline of a woman on a pavement (of the kind made by police in the aftermath of a murder), ran in Vogue at the same time.

Guy Bourdin's use of violence veils his underlying theme of vulnerability. Bourdin's vision despite the harsh interior flash lighting, is a romantic one; his women are gay and carefree when pictured with men; wistful and pensive as if just abandoned when alone. Their dishevelled attitude and expression suggest recently finished love-making.

Only as Helmut Newton began to link, wealth, sex, and fashion, now his hallmark, did he mature stylistically as a fashion photographer. Like his photographs for men's magazines, Newton's fashion work conveys an aggressive, and essentially European, concept of sexuality.

Newton's figure in the Saint Laurent suit provided him with a basis for continuing his investigation into the sexually ambiguous theme. The models act in what appears to be an illicit encounter in a hotel corridor, but on this occasion both 'male' and 'female' roles are played by women. The phallic symbolism of cigarettes, long exploited by their manufacturers, is used.

The moment when Helmut Newton's erotic fantasies became integral

HELMUT NEWTON:

Reproduced in French Vogue May 1975 p.77

HELMUT NEWTON
FRENCH VOGUE, MARCH 1979.

to his fashion photographs coincided closely with the rise of the international feminist movement. It was largely his photographs that provoked the charge that fashion photographs are pornographic and that they degrade and violate women. However, so long as there is no consensus on what constitutes pornography, debate on this subject will remain inconclusive. It was complicated in the 1970s by the undermining of gender stereotyping, exemplified by the pop-star androgyne (David Bowie, Patti Smith) and the proliferation of post punk sub cultures which utilised fashion to express sexual non conformity (13). For his part, Newton has always stressed that while he enjoys going to the edge of 'pornography' he does not think in terms of making outright pornographic images.

Newton's photographs defy the simplistic argument that they exploit women. They are incontestably male fantasies, but it does not automatically ensue that they are misogynistic. His view is distanced, cool, the incisive 'realism' of Newton's photographic technique serving to acknowledge and emphasise the artificiality of the staged fashion photograph. He challenges sexual stereotyping - and stereotyped reactions - with sly humour and ingenuity. In 'The Story of Ohhh' he photographed Lisa Taylor lounging on a settee, legs spread apart in a gesture that in earlier fashion photography (and in society in general) would have been considered 'unladylike'. A man, naked from the waist up, walks out of the frame: Ms. Taylor's gaze is directed at him, and it is her interest in him that the photograph dwells on - the male view point is further reduced by the man's head being cropped out. This hardly accords with the assertion that Newton is concerned only to depict women as passive, sexually

HELMUT NEWTON
VOGUE, MAY 1975.

HELMUT NEWTON
AMERICAN VOGUE, NOV 1976

submissive. In a later photograph for Anika the model stands off-centre, watched by a group of sunbathing men. But her back is to the camera, which is positioned immediately behind her so that she dominates the space. We share her perspective which, though we remain unaware of her facial expression, appears to be one of disinterested, or contemptuous, surveyal of the men.

In Newtons' theatre of wealth, sex and power, women act, and are often shown independently of men. His detached, unsentimental vision of women is nowhere more evident than in his series of the 'Naked and the Dressed' made for French and Italian Vogue in 1981. The confidently striding almost robotic, women are photographed clothed and unclothed in identical poses. Newton indulges his fascination with undressing and simultaneously poses questions about the convention of covering our bodies, about dress, and fashion photography itself.

Newton's photographs imply love-making without love and without regret; his models, the antithesis of Bourdin's personifications of tender vulnerability, are always in control. Newton's photography is concerned with the re-definition of women's sexual relationships that took place in the 70s. It encompasses, for example, gay relationships and those in which the woman is the sexual aggressor. Newton's photograph of two women, one nude and one mannishly attired in an elegant Saint Laurent suit, is a striking example of sexual ambiguity and a complex index of sexual moves. In this photo and others, Newton plays with the question of lesbianism as a facet of female sexuality. Newton's pose of a woman with cropped hair wearing a man-tailored suit and her placement next to a bare-

HELMUT NEWTON
FRENCH VOGUE, NOV 1981

HELMUT NEWTON
FRENCH VOGUE, NOV 1981

HELMUT NEWTON:

French Vogue September 1975 p.164.
Saint Laurant.

Helmut N
Opposite
Reproduc
p. 258
Gelatin si
"The Mink
collar and
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Courtesy

Helmut N
Left: Varia
Vogue, Se
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Boy/Girl
the Ritz."
Courtesy

breasted woman play havoc with traditional concepts of masculinity amd feminity, sexual aggression and passivity, male dominance and female subjection. Another shot which is a similar theme is one showing a model in a bikini embracing a lithe-looking dummy. These photos are upsetting not only because of their questionable taste but because of the issues to which they address themselves. Not surprisingly, the published photo of the model and mannequin embracing was less charged without the dummy figure. Newton has created a fabulous spoof on lesbianism as well as caused the viewer to react to the model's provocative embrace with an inanimate figure. The picture's potency - though not its effect - is diffused once the subject is perceived.

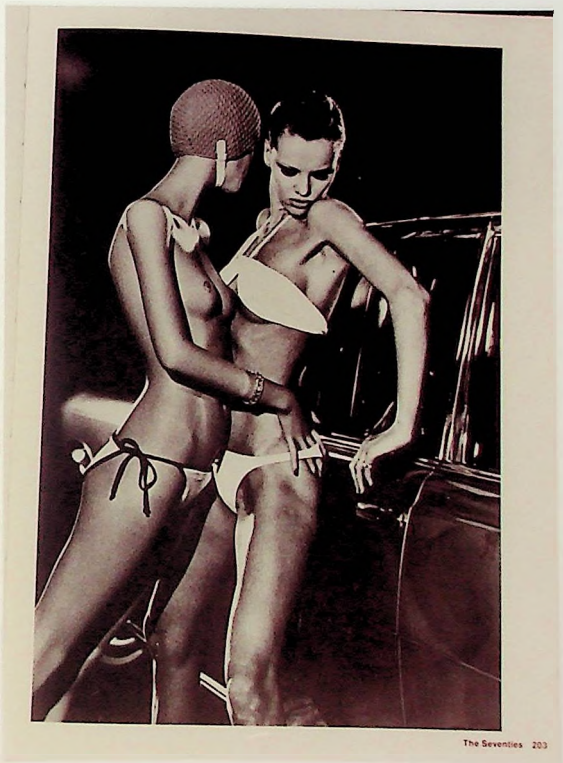
For all their concern with sexuality, Newton's women convey an air of detachment. He regards nudity with the same casualness and lack of emotion as is displayed on the Riviera. Touching of bodies - for instance Newton's shot of a man coolly, almost distractedly, putting his hand down into a woman's bodice - conveys a sense of casual encounter rather than impassioned tenderness.

In the late 70s Newton worked exclusively for French Vogue, Der Stern, and Playboy, which may explain why he liberally mixes fashion with pornography. Yet his pictures are not merely dazzling and flashy productions, but beautifully structured and technically flawless.

Part of the seductive fascination of Newton's work lies in his frequent linkage of fashion with glamour and wealth, most commonly in the settings of the European belle monde. Backgrounds of grand hotels where sex and glamour are combined in clandestine affaires

HELMUT NEWTON:

French Vogue Dec. 1975 - Janunary 1976 p.167.



of the very wealthy, and swimming pools used as symbols of the idle rich, appear repeatedly. Even the clothes Newton chooses to illustrate, notably sensuous lingerie or furs worn over bare flesh reinforce these recurrent themes.

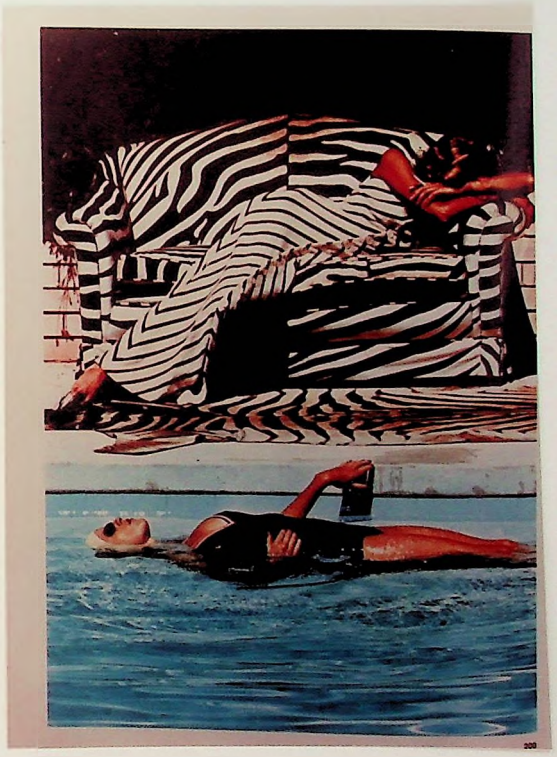
One of the most perfect combinations of content and technique is the photograph Newton refers to as the "Zebra Swimming Pool", a work originally published in French Vogue. Here a lush, erotic effect is produced by combining a warm and sexually suggestive setting with a complex play of texture and hidden shape.

Some of Helmut Newton's photographs, though fortunately not the best, depend for their effect on pornography and terror: his fashion work is at its best when it is marked by haughty flippancy or cool sophistication, at its worst when it descends into the overtly perverse.

The link between sex and violence is also evident in the work of young New York-based photographer, Chris Von Wangenheim. His flashy sensational shot of the model Lisa Taylor with a ferocious-looking Doberman Pinscher is terrifying on many levels.

Von Wangenheim, however, takes a different direction than Newton. The main sense one gets from a Von Wangenheim photograph is that of voyeurism, of happening upon some secretly perverse sado-masochistic ritual or homosexual intimacy.

Von Wangenheim believed that fashion photography's function was to sell clothes, and the means to an end was seduction. 'Consequentially a woman as seductress sells through flirtation and titillation. Physical sex is not necessary, the promise will do'.(14) His aim was to shock, and he illustrated the contradictions contained in his work with the example of 'Regine and the Fourteen year-old boy', photographed for American Vogue in 1974: 'The implication is that he's her lover and



HELMUT NEWTON
FRENCH VOGUE

HELMUT NEWTON
AMICA, 1982
FASHION, Aima

Chris von Wangenheim
Advertising photograph for Dior, 1976

CHRIS VON WANGENHEIM, 1976.

• CHRIS VON WANGENHEIM
AMERICAN VOGUE, FEB 1977

• CHRIS VON WANGENHEIM
VOGUE, APRIL 1974

DEBORAH TURBEVILLE
VOGUE, MAY 1975

she's the older woman. On the other hand it is nothing more than a mother-son relationship'. By the late 1970's Von Wanganheim's photographs were more openly involved with voyeurism and sado-masochism.

Woman fashion photographers have not necessarily been immune from charges of sexism either, some feminist critics have refused to make an exception on these grounds. On the other hand Sarah Moon states that in all fashion photography 'the sexuality is inherent: but when I photograph women it is not acted upon, not provoked. There are exterior signs of sexuality - a coded language of symbols created by men but men do not see when it is faked - women are intuitive about this.'(15)

In his book Ways of Seeing, the critic John Berger wrote:

'Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men and women, but the relations of women to themselves. This phenomonen prevails through high art and low culture, and through the centuries. The images of women are created by men to the shape of their own desires, needs and fears. Women, historically dependent on men and in the power of men, manipulated and exploited those fantasies to their own advantage. A nasty situation and a stressful one.'

So women sought to construct images that were their own and, as they redefine themselves, even male fashion designers empathised and worked to give them a wardrobe untainted by the symbolism of the past. Thierry Mugler (fashion designer and fashion photographer) did the opposite. He sent down the runway a cavalcade of Hollywood vamps and cartoon heroines, sado-masochistic fantasies and deranged versions of characters out of myth, history, romance, fairytale and sci-fi comic strip.


Thierry Mugler
Thierry Mugler
PHOTOGRAPHIE : THIERRY MUGLER
49, avenue Montaigne, 75008 Paris

Every male-created female icon got the Mugler treatment. Even the catholic church's eldest daughter, the Virgin Mary, was not safe.

It seemed paradoxical. Mugler was undeniably mocking all those cliches of female desirability and virtue, rendering them monstrous and ridiculous, revealing them for the two-dimensional parodies that they are. Yet he was in business to sell the clothes which costumed his parodies. It is not quite good enough to argue, as he does, that if you take away all the flummery, the props, the headdresses, the accessories, you have beautifully tailored, simple, almost classical clothes.

'But these are the clothes than women want to wear,' he protests. 'These are not images foisted upon them by men. You can tell by the way the models enjoy them. They hold their bodies in a different way, in a sensuous way. These fantasies are their fantasies. Fantasies are important.' [Elle, Dec.1990].

Perhaps Mugler's joke is not on the woman who identifies with the parody, adopts it and uses it, but on the man who is vulnerable to its power. Which would include the designer himself.

He started to take photographs, and in the book of his pictures, Thierry Mugler (Thames and Hudson Nov. 1988) lies the key to understanding Thierry Mugler.

The Hollywood tragedy queen, the towering lithe limbed woman warrior from some low gravity planet are photographed as a single fragment, a single frame from a comic strip which hints that, if you could see the preceding frames and the ones that came after, you would be swept into a blood-stirring tale of mysterious

passion, romance and adventure.

'My clothes,' says Mugler, 'are very sexy, very body conscious. They always have been... I do think that most women are in some way Narcissistic; they like to display their bodies in a sexy way. It gives them a private pleasure. After all, sexuality is life, it is energy, it is vitality.

Women's clothes should have a sense of sexual energy. For many years this was denied. People were shocked. They said what I did was vulgar. Fifteen or so years ago, when I started to work on my own, doing these sort of clothes, it was a total scandal. You could only find things like that in shops reserved for prostitutes. The politics of the time, feminism, denied expression of women's sexuality. It was wrong.'

Most feminists now accept that hiding gender differences under capacious dungarees or a bland, neutered version of a man's business suit was a denial of the female rather than the assertion it was thought to be. But as a symbolic retreat from a sexual arena where men wrote the rules, it was, for many an essential stage to be passed through. Only by renouncing what appeared to be aesthetic standards imposed by a culture designed by men for men could women feel free to work out their own ways of expressing their sexual identity.

Since about 1970 the literature on photography has increased on an unprecedented scale. Much of the criticism is lamentably introspective and limited in its frames of reference. It is probably no coincidence, therefore, that arguably its two most influential critics, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, both came to the subject from disciplines outside of photography. Moreover, their approaches to reading photographic imagery appear to have side-stepped the prejudice that fashion photography is a topic unworthy of informed debate.

Roland Barthes saw that to penetrate and understand fashion photography's complex language and rhetoric required closer study. He proposed a definition in The Fashion System: '...the Fashion Photograph is not just any photograph, it bears little relationship to the news photograph or the snapshot, for example; it has its own units and rules; within photographic communication, it forms a specific language which no doubt has its own lexicon and syntax, its own banned or approved "turns of phrase".'(16)

The investigation of fashion photography's 'lexicon and syntax' was clearly not a priority for Barthes, whose hostility to the subject is barely masked. Further to 'banned or approved turns of phrase', he refers to 'Fashion's "bon ton", which forbids it to offer anything aesthetically or morally displeasing...'(17). Barthes' text was written between 1957 and 1963; the magazines on which he based his research, principally Jardin des Modes and Elle, all dated from 1958 and 1959. He could not forsee that fashion - and especially fashion photography - would shortly provoke aesthetic and moral displeasure.

Barthes' source material throughout The Fashion System is

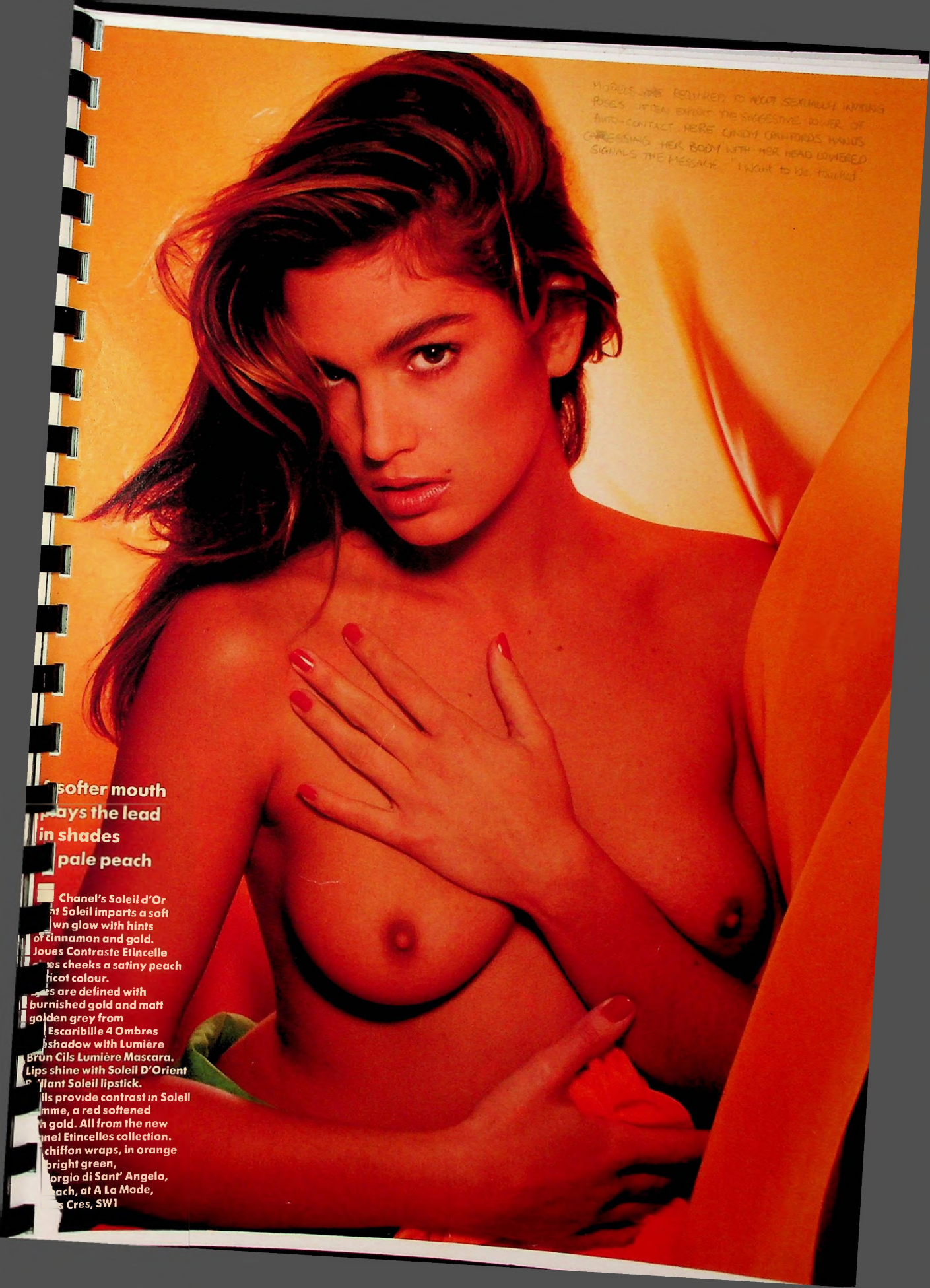
LA CAGE AUX FAUVES

FRANK HOWART
Jardin de Modes, Nov 1958

fashion as photographed, and written. (As Susan Sontag observed, 'more and more fashion is fashion photography'). (18) He discusses themes which prevailed in the late 1950s: in fashion photography, the world is usually photographed as a decor, a background or a scene, in short, as theatre. The theatre of Fashion is always thematic: an idea (or more precisely, a word) is varied through a series of examples or analogies.' He cites examples of the rudimentary associations of ideas this method generated: 'The travel cloak for the Fleche d'Or, the docks, slag heaps, a ferry boat.... fur evokes wild beasts and wild beasts evokes a cage: we'll show a woman in furs behind heavy bars'. The latter photograph is an example of time refuting Barthes' claims about not threatening fashion's 'bon ton'. To-day it might cause offence to both feminists and the animal rights movement.

Ultimately, Barthes was motivated by a condescension towards fashion which sometimes prevented him from seeing beyond his 'system'.

In A Critical History of American Photography, Jonathon Green asserts, 'The end result of fashion photography is not art, but increased sales and corporate control.' (19) Arguing that fashion photography 'chronicles the narrow history of social elegance and decadent aristocratic taste', he contrasts Irving Penn's photographs of Lisa Fonssagrives with Robert Frank's 'dour pregnant women', adding that 'in 1967 Avedon put Twiggy and Penelope Tree through their paces while Arbus photographed grotesque ladies at masked balls and a seated



softer mouth
ays the lead
in shades
pale peach

Chanel's Soleil d'Or
nt Soleil imparts a soft
wn glow with hints
of cinnamon and gold.
Joues Contraste Etincelle
es cheeks a satiny peach
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es are defined with
burnished gold and matt
golden grey from
Escaribille 4 Ombres
eshadow with Lumière
Brun Cils Lumière Mascara.
Lips shine with Soleil D'Orient
llant Soleil lipstick.
ils provide contrast in Soleil
mme, a red softened
h gold. All from the new
nel Etincelles collection.
chiffon wraps, in orange
bright green,
orgio di Sant' Angelo,
ach, at A La Mode,
s Cres, SW1

man in bra and stockings'. These comparisons, Green maintains, are analogous to 'the relationship between romance and reality', but, in selecting two of the most subjective of social documentarists to exemplify photographers of 'reality', he raises more questions that he answers.

Germaine Greer in The Female Eunuch has defined the female stereotype as 'The Eternal Feminine'. 'She is the Sexual Object sought by all men, and by all women. She is of neither sex, for she has herself no sex at all. Her value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others. All she must contribute is her existence. She need achieve nothing, for she is the reward of achievement. She need never give positive evidence of her moral character because virtue is assumed from her loveliness, and her passivity. Innocently she may drive men to madness and war. The more trouble she can cause, the more her stocks go up, for possession of her means more the more demand she excites. Nobody wants a girl whose beauty is imperceptible to all but him; and so men welcome the stereotype because it directs their taste into the most commonly recognised areas of value, although they may protest because some aspects of it do not tally with their fetishes. There is scope in the stereotype's variety for most fetishes. The leg man may follow mini-skirts, the tit man can encourage see-through blouses and plunging necklines, although the man who likes fat women may feel constrained to enjoy them in secret. There are stringent limits to the variations on the stereotype,

for nothing must interfere with her function as sex object.'

JEANETTE WINTERSON ON FEMALE EROTICA.

'The common image of sexual photography is one of lustful enthusiasm. Men must have access to all this stuff because they are wild about Woman. She is central, urgent. She has the power, as body or muse. They are obsessed with her, both as art icon and bedroom fantasy. Playboy boss, Hugh Hefner, has said that pornography celebrates women.' [Marie Claire No. 27, Nov. 1990 Page 63].

Jeanette Winterson believes the truth to be quite different; that there is no engagement with the woman either at the level of production or consumption. She is the sum of her parts and these parts are discussed, manipulated and packaged in much the same way as a set of machine tools.

It is her belief that the ritual of dressing and undressing has become the doorway from one world into another; from the world of ordinary concerns where they went shopping and saw their friends to the hyperbole of soft porn, where the simplest things are over-stated.

Although she has said she would like to sweep along the top shelves of the newsagent, taking with her the glossy magazines which regularly suggest that the latest folding tripod comes with a free pair of breasts, she claims her reasons are not censorious, and certainly not anti-erotic. 'I don't want a world full of

good girls. I want a world full of women whose bodies are for themselves. Women whose identity is not wiped out by the male gaze.' That 'Between the viewer and the viewed intrude all kinds of cultural and gender-based assumptions. We know this to be true in the most ordinary situations: how much then is it reinforced when the gazer is actively encouraged to assume whatever he likes about the figure before him?'

Convinced that objectifying women through photography is about fantasy, '...it is about men making up women; not only their hair and faces and dress, but their identity. The real woman, with her own ideas and desires is rubbed out; in her place is elevated the doll fetish, the woman born of man who lives to please her creator.

This distortion - not nakedness and sweat and tears and ecstasy is the problem we face. Our bodies are not obscene and they should not be covered up or told to be decorous. The obscenity lies in the destruction of the female for the elevation of the male,' her recommendation for men, 'who can only get a hard-on by looking at a body created in their own image', is therapy.

A healthy option is to insist on redefining the erotic in terms of female rather than male experience. She would not want men to package women but to allow the freedom to describe themselves. She feels there is a need for a broader historical perspective that allows us to think about women's sexuality as a developing continuum, rather than a series of fragments, mostly modern.

Jeanette cannot over stress the value of putting a woman back at the centre of her own sexuality. 'The pornography aspect of the fashion industry has made us incidental to ourselves; we are crucial but we don't count. It is very difficult for women to be comfortable with their own bodies and in touch with their real sexual needs when a fetished version of bodies and needs is regularly dished up not only to excite men but also to persuade them to buy any old goods,

be it soft drinks or aftershave. All women have oral sex with their chocolate bars, don't they?'

Not surprisingly, she feels womens erotica does not focus on men. They are there but incidentally, their purpose being to pleasure the woman, not to force her into second place.

'But this is not a simple reversal of the male perspective: men may be removed from the central role they so covet, but they are not, except by certain specialists, objectified and humiliated. Women do not see a sado-masochistic relationship as the common currency of desire. Whilst most men will admit to finding violence sexy, most women will not.

Women, unlike men, do not appear to agree on the broadstream of what is sexy. Whether this is a fact about women per se, or a legacy of the oppression and suppression of how we really feel, I don't know. But on the positive side, it does bring a lively variety to an industry dominated by pricks and where to put them.'

Her final recommendation is that ,'...we will have alot more to do than dismantle the top shelf and send home the bunny girls if we are really to change the way that men think about women.'

PATRICA REDLICH ON READING IMAGES.

Most women try to be beautiful. Or, as most women would modestly say, they try to make the most of themselves. And in pursuit of such beauty, or attempted perfection, they wear make-up, get their hair cut, remove unwanted hair from eyebrows, chins, armpits and legs, have their ears pierced and dress with varying degrees of style. Increasingly, they go to beauticians, watch their diets and undergo cosmetic surgery.

At face value, all that seems very simple and unproblematic. Merely a question of considering value for money and avoiding over spending - just like any other consumer behaviour.

And yet every woman knows that it is not that simple. Few


a man. a woman. a camera.
Lagerfeld
PHOTO


KODAK FILM
Lagerfeld
PHOTO
FRAGRANCE FOR MEN

of us have escaped having to ask ourselves why we wear make-up. Whom do we really dress for? Whom are we trying to impress? We discuss and defend and justify,ending up feeling defensive and vulnerable.

What lies behind all this discusion and debate is a basic acknowledgement of the fact that women are exploited - disproportionately - in our society. That their anxiety and insecurity about themselves and their own worth as human beings is constantly re-inforced rather than alleviated, and that they are thus encouraged to compensate by attempting to improve themselves. Since their role in life is to be decorative rather than intelligent, this improvement takes on the form of beauty aids.

In other words, the theory, or received wisdom, is that women wear make-up because they are exploited. Hence every time they take out lipstick or nip into the beautician they have to have their defence ready, they have to be able to justify how they can possibly submit to such oppression. Which is, in itself, an awful pressure.

Having succumbed to the pressure you may leave the salon feeling beautiful but still miserable and full of guilt at selling out and being so unemancipated.

Only after years of vacillating between hairy legs and snazzy suits did Patricia Redlich realise that the theory was only partially true; that women's anxieties and feelings of inadequacy were only a small part of why we pursue beauty. And indeed that their undoubted exploitation often played no role at all in this decision.

She has claimed that; 'the truth is that make-up and clothes

are essentially about non verbal communication. With them we send out messages to the people around us, telling them (or hiding from them) things about ourselves.'

Because with make-up and beauty aids widely available and generally accepted as the norm for women, all we can do is decide to conform or not to conform. Either way, we are saying somthing about ourselves to the outside world. The only difference is the degree of ease with which the world can read the message.

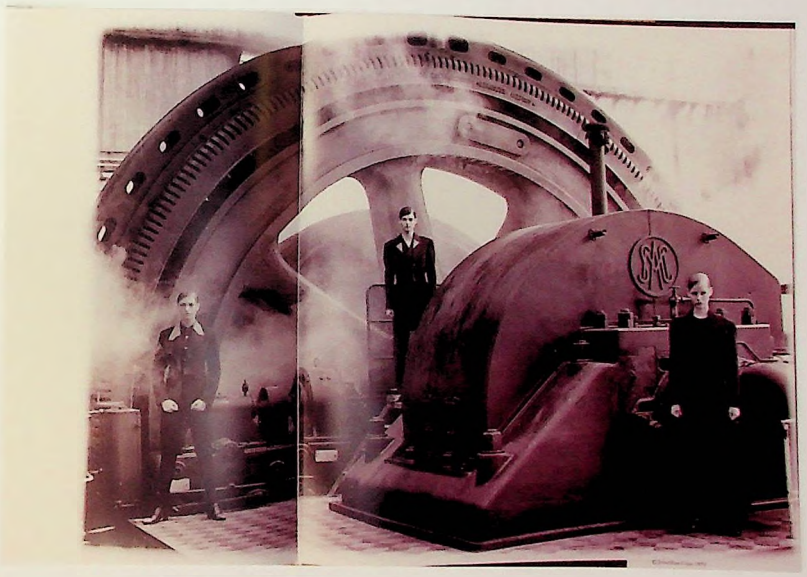
'By wearing make-up they are telling you that they are vulnerable enough to feel the need for improvement,but secure enough not to have to hide their vulnerability; that they are determined to avail of what modern knowledge and technology have to offer and refuse to remain victims of an accident of birth'.

In other words, women put on the face and the glad rags for plenty of positive reasons. Because they love themselves and not because they are scared? Because they want to give themselves and others pleasure?

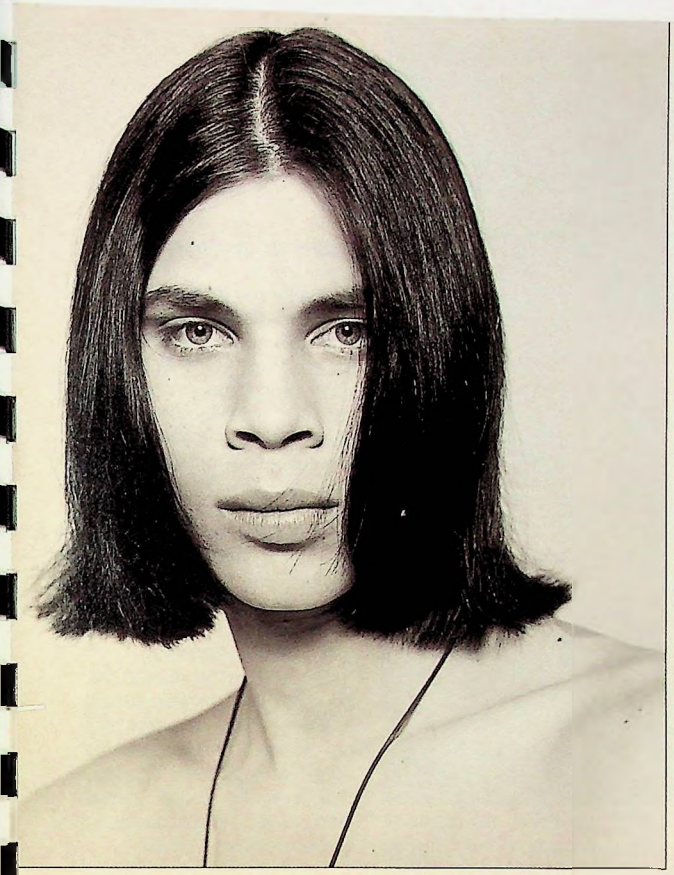
She strongly believes that what has really happened over the last twenty years is that, 'the sheer availability of a wide range of beauty aids and high fashion clothes has created the conditions for women to get in touch with their bodies to develop a personal style, demanding from them at the same time a definite attitude towards personal beauty. In the process, the very concept of beauty has been liberated from the realm of sexual exploitation'.

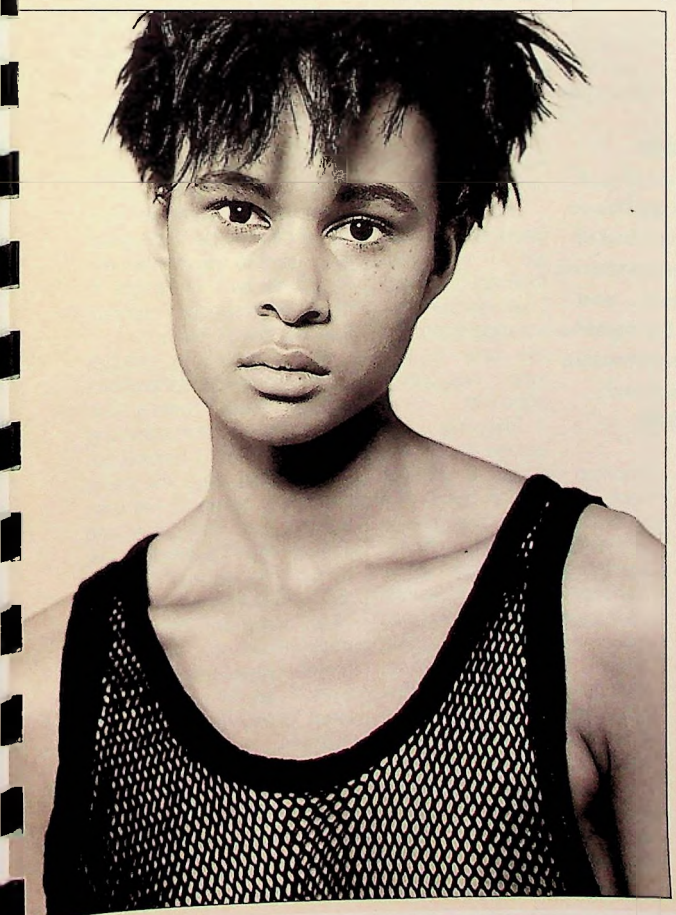
We are now free to stop feeling anxious and apologetic?

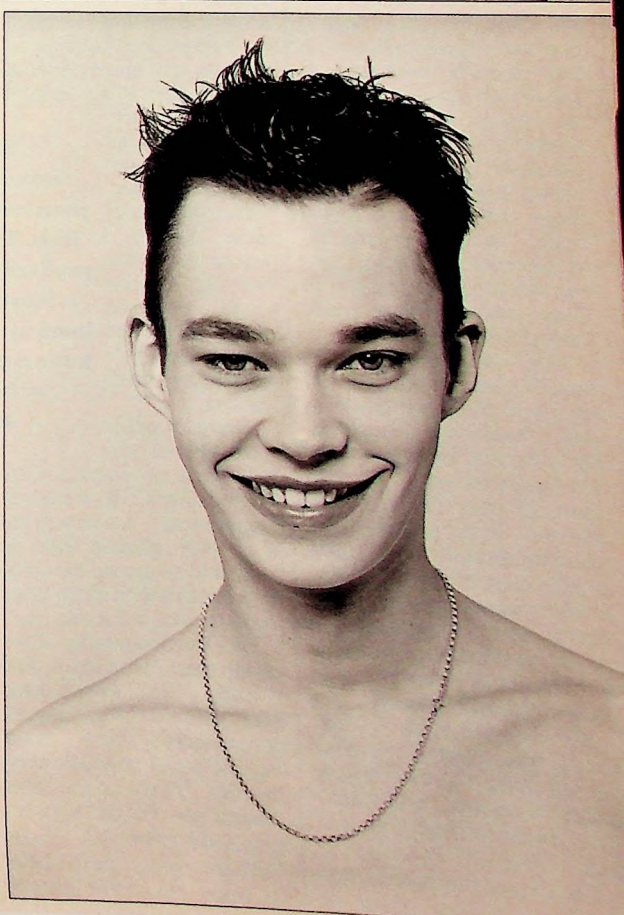
MODERN ANDROGYNY



PETER LINDBERGH
Comme des Garçons 1988







THE NEW ANDROGYNY.

Time was when men were men and women were women. We all knew who wore the trousers and who got to grow their hair long - and if you didn't know then you must have been some kind of freak. From Adam and Eve, all the way down the line, the idea of what was male and what was female behaviour and appearance was writ, if not in stone, then in flesh and blood.

Then all hell broke loose - the women started wanting to wear the trousers and the men not only wanted to grow their hair, but wear flowers in it as well. Confusion for one and all. Is it a boy or is it a girl? Who would have thought a little long hair on the wrong head could lead to so much trouble. Times changed and it became accepted that just because a guy had long hair it didn't mean he wanted to be a girl - and if a woman wanted to wear a trouser suit to work it didn't mean she wished she was a man.

This much we know. Now, French photographer Bettina Rheims has challenged us to a new sexual revolution. Her wryly titled collection, Modern Lovers, celebrates a sexual ambiguity that is not about clothing or hair length, but reaches beyond our old ideas of male and female to explore a new state of androgyny.

If you look at these pictures very quickly you cannot tell which are men and which are women. But far from looking like freaks, they are more a reflection of the reality of our modern city streets. These modern lovers are part of a generation that does not adhere to our pin-up ideals of the 'opposite' sex.

What Rheims gives to her subjects is the ability to be themselves: the freedom not to fit into the tired composite image of male and female.

These men and women are truly naked: they wear no mask to indicate their gender, and although all are quite beautiful, they are not trying to say or sell anything, least of all their bodies. No new age pornography, this - they regard the viewer with a cool, direct openness.

This is beyond the 70s' notion of unisex - which denied sexuality - and beyond the 80s' fashion for gender bending, which hid sexuality beneath make-up and cross-dressing. Then, we were amused by skirts for men and impressed by cropped hair on women. Boy George (the feminine man) and Annie Lennox (the masculine woman) posed as the opposite sex, but this swapping of roles proved to be little more than a pantomime. Though they appeared androgynous on the outside, it did little to resolve the gender conflicts that had been growing throughout the century.

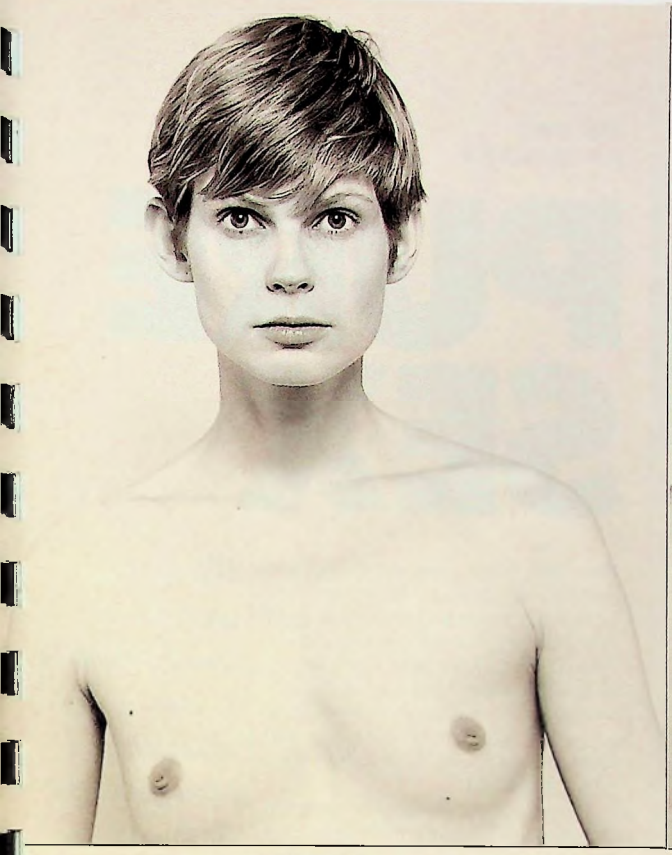
The sexual revolution of the 60s and the women's liberation movement of the 70s gradually replaced the idea of male and female as physical polarities with a view of male and female as part of a psychological balance within.

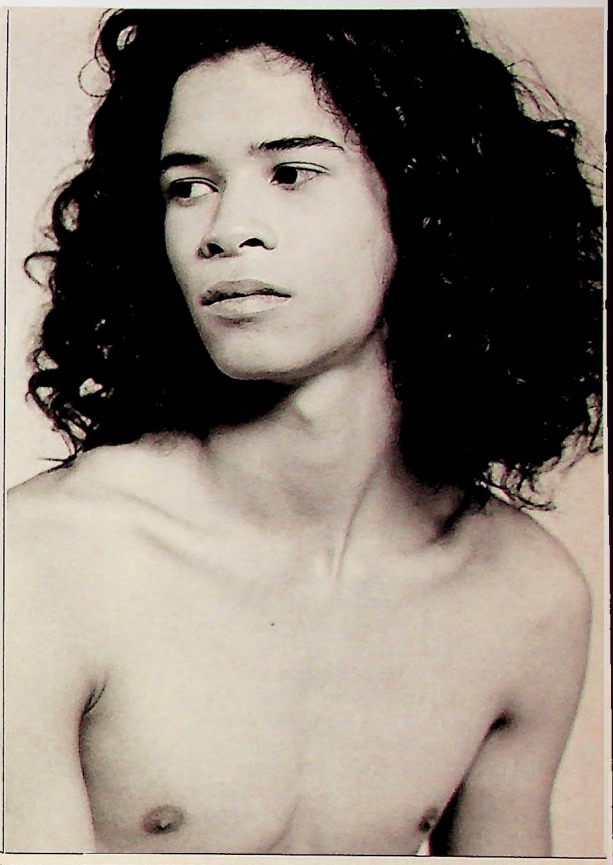
Rheims' modern lovers blur the age old divide between the sexes. They say that men can be vulnerable and gentle without renouncing their masculinity. They say that women can transcend the pressure to prettify and beautify themselves without becoming unfeminine. They say define yourself rather than fit into a composite. They say be what you are.

Rheims tells the truth about men and women, and points a way forward. While for some this truth may be uncomfortable - a grey area that threatens a loss of sexual identity - the gentleness of her androgynes and the honesty with which they look into the camera

reflects the balance they seem to have found within themselves.

Rheims has captured the physical embodiment of a new mental state. Her androgynes do not need to define their sexuality in terms of the old extremes of male and female, black and white, right or wrong, gay or straight.





CONCLUSION.

The great interest in fashion photography to-day is a symptom of the contemporary obsession with power.

When power is present, money cannot be far away; and the growth of fashion photography has depended on the faith that fashion sells. But this would not work without the main power ingredient - sex: the all powerful and universal human motive for action, the energizer that makes humans love, act, buy and give. Throughout the visual history of mankind the symbol of sex and love has been woman. Very little has changed to-day and the gift of the modern photographer is his Pygmalion-like ability to transform every child of the street into a momentary goddess and an object of envy and desire.

In the beginning everything was simple. The basic purpose of fashion photography was just to show women wearing clothes; but, through the years, the elemental need was transformed into a subtle and complex operation that involved art, talent,

technique, psychology, and salesmanship.

To achieve its goal, fashion photography needs to seduce - to interest and transport the spectator into a world of illusion. Our dreams and our imagination are the sources of our own desires. Photography, a modern 'opium of the people', and fashion photography, as its entertainment branch, have the ability to change our vision momentarily and move us into a more attractive realm of existence. The impetus to action through images is the power of fashion photography.

Games are played using a stylized, unreal image of woman as contrast for the 'sordid' everyday reality of life. The total image signalled to women: 'I am different, my world is not your world; try to achieve this look, it is your ticket of escape from what surrounds you into the heaven of fashion and the unbelievable nirvana of luxe and elegance.'

Fashion photography has played an extremely important role in the emancipation of women. No other group of human beings has been portrayed so extensively and so publicly; and no medium has reproduced as many varying images of women as Women's magazines.

The images of women, accumulated through the years since photography began, have left their imprint on the collective unconscious. The question of whether a photograph is art or not has very little meaning. The real achievement of photography is the ability to create a memory bank of the way women at a given moment in certain societies have looked and cast their power spell.

Photography is a voyeuristic medium. Men and women have

a built in psychological urge to observe and glorify the beauty of women; and part of the woman's eternal role has always been to stimulate erotic desire.

Modern photography - with the liberation of mental and social restraints, with the freeing of modern dress - has dared to suggest more explicitly erotic situations and to present more nudity. Some photographers to-day have attempted a visual breakthrough by an indiidual style based on shock. Scenes of terror and violence have crept on to the photography of clothes; but it is as if each magazine page were a stage and everything on the stage were pure make believe. But the attention getting value of the resulting strangeness keeps clothes that could otherwise be quickly forgotten imprinted on the readers mind. Sex Sells!

Gone are the days when supercharged adolescents had to buy National Geographic to get a glimpse of bare flesh. Now pick up any women's fashion magazine and they practically fall out of the pages, hosed down, smathered in oil, sheathed in sheer chiffon.

Who can say why they're turning up everywhere? Maybe women are re-asserting their right to be feminine. Maybe men are re-asserting their tendancy to objectify women.

MAD HATTE

THIS PAGE: SKIN, RICHLY SCENTED AND MOISTURI
WITH YSATIS BEAUTY CREAM, GLISTENS WITH YS
BEAUTY OIL SPRAY. IVORY MOISTURIS
FOUNDATION, ON FACE, DUSTED WITH THE POW
PRISM. EYES INTENSIFIED WITH ANTHRACITE-TOP
DUO EYESHADOW AND BLACK CREAM MASCA
BEIGE NO 12 LIPSTICK. ALL BY GIVEN
BLACK VINYL SHORTS, AND HIGH BLACK LEAT
BOOTS, BY THIERRY MUGLER, AT HARAB
BLACK WINDTUNNEL HAT, BY PHILIP TRE
TO ORDER, AT HARR

CALL OF THE WIL

OPPOSITE: CHANEL'S ROUGE CONTRASTE RO
EXTREME FROM NEW CHANEL CONTRASTES COLLECT

Trousers by Contemporary Wardrobe/Stylist Chris Brown/Hair and make-up Tracy Lermar for Mandy Coakley/Model Nora Krysl/Photographed at The Hackney Empire

PHOTOSURREAL

Expect the unexpected. Lagerfeld Photo is no exception. It's charged with unparalleled intensity and marked by the unique vision of its creator

ALASTAIR THAIN

'Expressing himself through photos as opposed to words'


HERB RITTS

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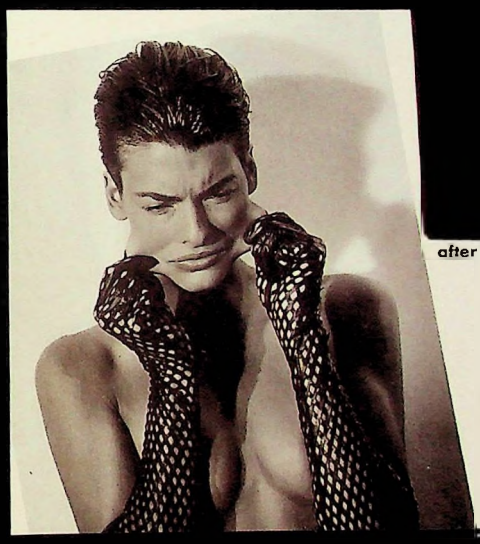

after Helmut Newton's controversial, sadistic fashion images in the seventies, Steven Meisel portrays the model as masochist, 1989