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Objectification of Women in Fashion and Advertising Photography

Varvara Gorbunova

Thesis advisor: Tereza Stejskalová
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Objektivizace Žen v Módní a Reklamní Fotografii

Varvara Gorbunova

Vedoucí Práce: Tereza Stejskalová

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Abstract

This work is an attempt to investigate the shift that is happening amongst trends in representation of women in fashion and advertising photography. The research is particularly focusing on the concept of sexual objectification with examining it through two of its components: 'male gaze' perspective (referencing Laura Mulvey) and fetishism (referencing Sigmund Freud, Diana Fuss).

It also aims to study the works of photographers such as Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdin, Ellen von Unwerth and others in comparison with younger generation of photographers who are currently setting the direction and making changes in the industry (Carlota Guerrero, Harley Weir, Ronan McKenzie).

Even though the main emphasis of the thesis is on the fashion industry: trends and strategies used in creation of visual communication, it will also explore its impact on the consumer. How differently men and women consume advertising and fashion imagery and, most importantly, what effects it has on women's mental health and their social life.

Práce mapuje, jak se mění reprezentace žen v módní a reklamní fotografii. Výzkum se konkrétně opírá o koncepci sexuální objektivizace, jíž zkoumá skrze související koncepty "mužského pohledu" Laury Mulvey a fetišismu, jak jej definuje Sigmund Freud a Diana Fuss. Cílem je analýza děl fotografů Helmuta Newtona, Guye Bourdina nebo fotografky Ellen von Unwerth a dalších ve srovnání s díly mladší generace fotografů/fotografek, kteří momentálně určují směr a mění reklamní/módní průmysl (Carlota Guerrero, Harley Weir, Ronan McKenzie). Přestože se práce soustřeďuje především na svět módy - trendy a strategie vytváření vizuální komunikace - zkoumá rovněž jejich dopad na konzumenty. Jde o to, jak odlišně muži a ženy konzumují reklamní a módní obrazy a jaké dopady to má na duševní zdraví žen a jejich život ve společnosti.

I. Introduction

Objectification is rooted in photography on different levels. In fact, it is an inherent vice of the medium: it captures and immobilizes its subject. From a philosophical perspective there is very little to change about it (even though it could be interpreted differently): it seizes a part of flowing identity and makes it static and material, giving birth to multiple doppelgangers with the power of reproduction. From a physical perspective, in the very beginning of photography's history, taking a portrait was a long and exhausting process both for a model and a photographer, which was very technically limited for most of its part. A person had to stay still, had to become a literal object for an amount of time defined by long exposures. Barthes made some very interesting points specifically regarding physical objectification in the first part of *Camera Lucida*: "Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object: in order to take the first portraits (around 1840) the subject had to assume long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight; *to become an object* made one suffer as much as a surgical operation; then a device was invented, a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens, which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the *statue I would become*.."[1]

Taking into account today's advanced technologies and uselessness of such devices, taking portraits has become much easier and faster, and the concept of physical objectification in portraiture is undermined by itself accordingly. However there is another level of objectification that exists within the photographic medium and affects individuals in a much deeper way. Something that spreads beyond photography, something that modern society has adopted as a tool for controlling power and manipulating through visual representations in modern-day media. Something that supports existing power structures and lets injustice thrive. Objectification that is parasitizing on the culture itself, presenting the human body as an object on a sociocultural level.

Due to existing political and economical systems, cultural objectification mostly affects women. We are constantly surrounded by images of women's bodies presented as objects and commodities. Most examples can be found in the fashion and advertising industries, using women's bodies to capitalise on insecurities and sell goods.

The goal of this research is to explore the roots of objectification, to show that it is widely used in media as a selling tool and examine how exactly it is applied in advertising. To this aim I will analyze works of classic fashion photographers

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[1] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*.New York: Hill & Wang, 1980, p. 13

(Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdain, Mario Testino, Terry Richardson, Ellen von Unwerth, Steven Klein), who contributed to creation of existing ideal and contemporary photographers (Carlota Guerrero, Ronan McKenzie, Harley Weir), who are trying to subvert it and compare them. I also strive to investigate the consequences that objectification has on women's mental health and social life and conclude on the ways of eradicating it.

II. Roots of Objectification

I propose that objectification functions intertwined with two primary components that are underlying culture in its present: male gaze and fetishism.
In this part I will discuss each one of them and explain why they are necessary for objectification to function (word 'objectification' from now on will be used specifically referring to sexual objectification of women's bodies to escape unnecessary explanation and evasion of the main topic).

Male gaze

Male gaze works hand in hand with objectification. It constitutes it and at the same time consists of it itself. The concept described by Laura Mulvey in *'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* dictates the way our society consumes visual information both regarding the moving (cinema, video, television) and still (photography, illustration) image. We are all predetermined to view women from men's perspective, or as Mulvey wrote (in relation to cinema): "As the spectator is identified with the main male protagonist he projects his look on to that of his like.."[2]. Male gaze connotes one way interaction of that 'active/male' look and 'passive/female' 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. The power imbalance is very apparent: what is expected from a female character is to obey and fulfill the fantasies of her observer whilst the 'bearer of the look' affirms his own authority. Therefore, women who are pushed to view themselves through the prism of male gaze experience a great pressure in regards to how they should look or behave. Objectification is functioning as one of the tools for supporting that imbalance and upholding the patriarchal order. Operating on the subconscious level, media is surrounding us with imagery where a woman's body is presented as a sexual object, maintaining the scopophilic and narcissistic inclinations of society

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[2] Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: p. 838

that advanced representation systems like cinema so thoroughly perfected and submitted us to throughout the years.[3]

In regards to photography, and fashion photography specifically, the presence of male gaze has always been an integral part of the image-making process. There has always been a cult of 'an older male photographer' (Helmut Newton, Mario Testino, Patrick Demarchelier etc.) and 'young female models' submitting to whatever the orders will be from the former. So it will not be an exaggeration to say that the whole fashion imagery is constructed fundamentally of the male gaze. Selling clothing and accessories, visual advertisements are merging the model with the object realm, equating her to new trendy bags and shoes (this also connotes disposability, depriving the model of any value as an individual and making her and her body the matter of fast-pacing fashion). In addition, only until the boom of Supermodels in the 80s, models were not usually credited for the shoots and all the praise would go to the photographer who 'captured' a certain image, presenting a model as just a mannequin, a production prop.

Interestingly enough, in his biography, Helmut Newton described the shoot where he was working with female mannequins instead of real models. He shot them in such a way of making the final image look so disturbingly realistic that the viewer would not be able to tell whether it was a mannequin or a real person in the pictures. He then proceeds to mention that he even had special names for some of them and an imaginary character.[4] Furthermore, even later on he had a few photographs that included the similar play with mannequins in his personal work, where he would put them together with real-life models in the same scene, creating very visually deceptive imagery.

This kind of visual play completely erases the line between the real and the fake: the model is becoming her dressed-up plaster-made copy losing any value as a human being.

Fetishism

This mannequin play slowly brings me to the next important part that objectification cannot function without, which is fetishism. Fetishism has always been present in the fashion and advertising worlds as it plays a big part in today's capitalism-based society and greatly contributes to upholding the consumer culture. Obviously the tight bond between the three - male gaze,

[3] Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: p. 835, 836
[4] *Autobiography: Helmut Newton*, Азбука-Аттикус 2014 (russian edition), p. 236-238

objectification and fetishism is an important prerequisite for capitalist structures to function, but fetishism is the main driving mechanism as it is strongly connected to the material. We fantasize about things, we desire things, we want to possess things. The more we want, the more limits are fading away and our obsessions thrive. Our desires go beyond morality, erasing the line between the longed-for object and a person. With globalization there is almost nothing that would not be available for purchasing. And, as the main ingredient, not being able to be detached from its own referent[5] photography supports that hunger for owning and overpowering. It makes the individuality material, turning character into a set of properties.

Advertising imagery supports that degradation: the female body has been subjected to exchange and consumption as a part of that imagery and, thus, due to the stillness of photography and its dependence to material fetishised and desired as an object. Fetish leads to objectification performing as a birthplace of desire.

Furthermore, according to Freud, fetish is inherently 'male'.[6] It finds its beginnings in early childhood, with the decisive moment of a boy finding out about the absence of his mother's penis. It is exactly the time, where he subconsciously starts looking for substitutes for this lack in fear of castration. That means fetish is born in and is solely revolving around the 'male beginning'. Therefore, not only it makes it tightly connected to the male gaze and connoting the role of a woman as a spectacle, but also it essentially seeks the object to attach to the body (to replace the penis), connoting the inferiority and will to overpower it.

Freud's description of a fetish was adapted as a marketing tool in advertising, often presenting a woman and a product that's being promoted as a whole or as two interdependent components (in an attempt to substitute the penis). SKYY Blue Vodka advertisement of 2002 is a perfectly illustrated idea of a Freud's fetish, presenting a man in the middle of the photograph, holding a bottle (one of the multiple phallic symbols) of vodka positioned right in between the legs of a woman standing in the foreground. The given image very accurately represents the desire of a man to fill in the 'missing part'.

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[5] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography.*New York: Hill & Wang, 1980, p. 5,6
[6] Freud, Sigmund. *Fetishism* (1927). Miscellaneous Papers, 1888-1938, Vol.5 of Collected Papers, (London :Hogarth and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1924-1950), p. 198
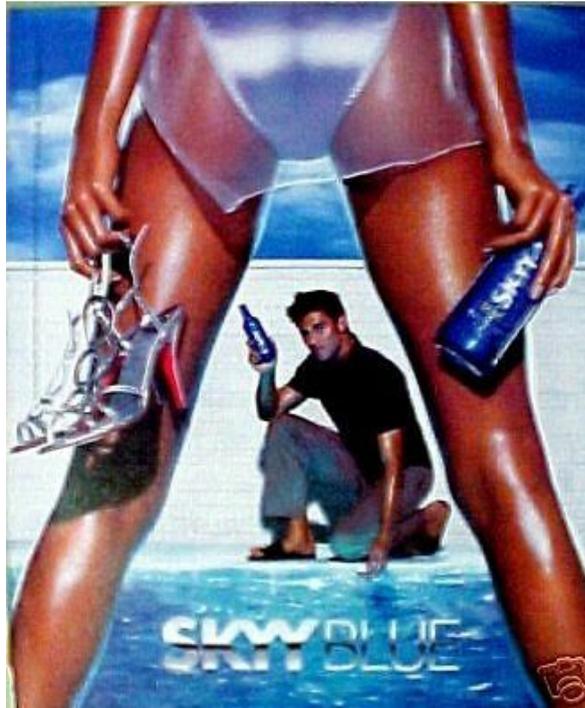
Figure 1: Skyy Blue Vodka, advertising campaign 2002

Commodity fetishism

It would be an omission not to mention the commodity fetishism when talking about sexual fetishism as it is being its close relative and a part of today's consumer culture.

First described by Marx, commodity fetishism performs as assigning certain 'magical' features to the objects and concealing the real cost of its production.[7] The conditions that let commodity fetishism thrive include separation between producer and the product (workers being exploited and alienated from the products of their labor by capitalists managing the production process) as well as the whole production process being concealed from the consumer, henceforth completely separated from the process of consumption and excluded from consumer's consciousness. This allows for the 'guilt-free' and 'responsibility-free' consumer to devour more and invest more into companies that support the system described above, finishing the vicious circle.[8] With all that being said, commodity fetishism performs as foundation both for sexual fetishization and objectification to prosper: by ascribing magical powers

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[7] Marx, Karl. *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume I, Book One: The Process of Production of Capital. Progress Publishers, 1997. p. 47

[8] Marx, Karl. *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume I, Book One: The Process of Production of Capital. Progress Publishers, 1997. p. 52

to commodities, it lets advertisers create artificial realities in which unrealistic representations of women are being promoted. We are faced with images of unrealistically rejuvenated older women on the TV screens claiming that by buying a specific cream it will make us appear 15 years younger. All these marketing strategies are being developed in order to make us think that if we invest in a product *x*, we will achieve a certain ideal (that advertisers create in those artificial realities). Not only it has an enormous effect on women's lives (which I will discuss later in my research) by defining frames for our existence and representation, it also, hence, allows the society to establish certain expectations for us and lets others demand fulfillment of those as inherently given.

Reading into objectification

From now on, understanding how these three components are interdependent and intertwined between each other lets see how exactly they function in fashion photography and what subconscious impressions they produce.
Taking into account that all the present power structures and systems are male-based, male-directed and male-oriented, I would like to take the concept of male gaze as something historically developed and inherently present in our culture. Thus, all the imagery and visual representations are produced solely through the framework of male vision. This omnipresent male gaze spreads to the existence of objectification and fetishism.
Let me be more specific by drawing an example.
For this, again, it is impossible to neglect the works of Helmut Newton when talking about formation of objectification. Fetishism and objectification specifically are very notably blatant in his works. One of the most famous and notorious photographs is *Saddle I*, shot in Paris in 1976 as a part of his personal collection. The woman portrayed in the photograph is vestured in a horse saddle (connotes submission, desire to be overpowered and obey), positioned on the bed (sexual implication) and seductively looking up, away from the camera (reveals the presence of another in the same space, the direction of the sight suggests possession of authority as the person receiving the look is positioned higher than the model).

Figure 2: Helmut Newton, 'Saddle I', Paris 1976

As soon as we begin to unveil the connotations of the image it becomes apparent how objectification works through visual representations.
The power relation in this image is very obvious: the man, as the bearer of the look, sees the woman (male gaze), the man sees the woman as an inferior (absence of the penis, fear of castration - fetishism), the man wants to possess the woman and use her for his own pleasure (objectification). And the most hazardous part of such representation is that Newton chooses to show the model as if she would want to be possessed, as if she would not care about her own integrity and let herself be controlled by given authority (a man).

A few words on *Dissection*

Taking a further look into fetish and fetishization, as well as discovering further aspects of objectification, integral role (mostly functioning on the subconscious level) is being played by *dissection* in visual imagery.
The process of co-called dissection is mainly manifesting itself in representing a female body in parts. Dissection is greatly contributing to the existence of fetish: "This representational body in pieces also functions for the female spectator as a cultural reminder of her fetishization … A fetish (typically legs, breasts, face, or other body part) is a substitute for thenal phallus, a prop or accessory fashioned to veil its terrifying absence"[9] as well as it is appearing to be a bedrock of objectification: the wholeness of a woman is being represented as a

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[9] Fuss, Diana. *Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look*. Critical Inquiry, Vol. 18, No. 4, Identities (Summer, 1992), The University of Chicago Press, p. 720

separate body part depending on the context. "Some of the most common and prevalent shots of female bodies in women's fashion photography are those of decapitation and dismemberment - in particular headless torsos and severed heads".[10] By losing integrality, the body is even easier associated with an object and automatically becomes subjected to objectification. Thus, presented as an object, the female body is widely exploited as a selling tool in marketing strategies. Everytime we take a step into any beauty store, we find ourselves surrounded by images of solely lips, eyes or hands. We see all the creative ways advertising companies have shot their campaigns with, but we fail to find any real or integral representation of women.

Figure 3: Guy Bourdin for French Vogue (May issue, 1970)

III. The Beauty Myth

Investigating the grounds of objectification: the roots of male gaze and fetish, dissection and commodity fetishism, it becomes apparent that objectification is, in a lot of ways, dictated by fashion, whereas respectively, fashion is dependent on and dictated by market.

Advertisement became the main manipulative instrument these days as it surrounds us everywhere (internet, television, magazines, billboards etc.) and has a constant subconscious influence on our brains and perception of reality we live in. Not only does advertising sell a product, behind the brand mark it sells a specific lifestyle, values, norms for behaving, looking etc. It creates strict standards for our way of living and makes us adapt certain behaviours and habits according to the ideal it promotes. As a rule, the ideal is always impossible to reach (even though manufacturers want us to think otherwise).

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[10] Fuss, Diana. *Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look*. Critical Inquiry, Vol. 18, No. 4, Identities (Summer, 1992), The University of Chicago Press, p. 718

When it comes to *living up to the ideal* - there is no better environment for objectification to thrive rather than the advertising. In order to sustain the consumerist habits in people and keep them constantly contributing to the market, advertisers poison cultural environments with unrealistic imagery which has a majorly negative impact on our well-being with one goal in mind: profit. Naomi Wolf came up with a concept, perfectly describing the whole system created to parasite on women and bring them down, in her book called *Beauty Myth*. According to Wolf, 'beauty myth' is a concept that was formed in a modern (male-oriented) culture, in which a woman is considered to be valuable by and solely evaluated based on her looks, on her *beauty*. The ideal that was set for women by the advertisers is a complete and unequivocal "perfection", we are taught from a very early age that we should spend most of our energy, time and money on looking good or, it would be more appropriate to say, on looking the way society thinks is good.

"There is no legitimate historical or biological justification for the beauty myth; what it is doing to women today is a result of nothing more exalted than the need of today's power structure, economy, and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women"[11]

Specific ideas about female beauty and sexuality are spread all over the advertising imagery. "Girls are encouraged .. to be sexually available while expecting little or nothing in return. As girls learn from a very early age that their sexualized behaviour and appearance are often rewarded by society, they learn to sexualize themselves, to see themselves as objects"[12] claims Jean Killbourne, in her research documentary '*Killing Us Softly 4*' (2010).

IV. Objectification in Fashion Photography

These strategies however, were not worked out in one day, or even a decade. It took a long, historical development to adapt us to such imagery and to further use it against us.

Let alone advertising in general, the fashion industry is where objectification was cultivated throughout the years, as visual representations in this area require a presence of a human body (mostly, female body) in order to demonstrate clothes.

Standards were established by the generation of photographers including Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdin and further carried on by Ellen von Unwerth, Mario Testino and others.

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[11] Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. William Morrow & Co. 1991, p. 13

[12] Jhally, Sut., and Jean Kilbourne. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010

Fashion Photography in the 60-70s: Cult of Newton and Bourdain

As a starting point, I would like to take fashion photography of the 60s and 70s to explore the roots of objectification in the imagery of the time and how it evolved until now.

Initially, I think it makes sense to base the research on conclusions drawn from the oeuvres of two most prominent photographers of that time (whose works I already analysed as examples above and) who are none other than Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin. Each one of them has an enormous contribution to fashion photography and are both famous for being an inspiration for the younger generations of photographers. These two were the ones to break the rules and redefine the profession of a fashion photographer as a whole.

Above all things, fashion is a fast-changing industry purpose of which, first and foremost, is to sell clothing (and related items such as accessories, cosmetics etc.) In the beginning of 20th century, with the introduction and rapid popularisation of fashion magazines photographers attained a platform to showcase their work to a largely vaster audience and go beyond the idea of 'simply demonstrating the garments' or 'shooting portraits'. The first ones to be published in the newborn Vogue and Vanity Fair magazines were photographers like Edward Steichen and Adolph de Meyer. These two are generally considered to be founding fathers of fashion photography: they were the first ones to set up a fashion image with extensive use of studio lighting and props. First fashion photographers were creating a story around the garment.[13]

Figure 4: Adolph de Meyer for American Vogue, 1922

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[13] *CLICK – THE HISTORY OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY* feature length documentary. dir. by Paul G Roberts, 2019.

The breaking point in development of fashion photography happened when the focus shifted from the garment to the body. What exactly both Newton and Bourdin cultivated was a so-called 'shock' element of the imagery they produced. The main goal was not to display the garments, but to amuse and scandalize the viewer.[14] The images had to stand out in numerous advertisements placed across the glossy pages. This editorial, for instance, shot by Guy Bourdain for Vogue Paris in 1977 is a good example of usage of such imagery. The amount of clothing on the model is minimal and her poses are very explicit. She is captured on highly vivid and saturated backgrounds with harsh light, which gives an image a very high-contrasty look.

Figure 5: Guy Bourdain for Vogue Paris, 1977

Figures 6: Guy Bourdain for Vogue Paris, 1977

More and more fashion magazines started to include more explicit content as a part of the visual imagery they promoted. In addition, sex, as one of the biggest

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[14] *CLICK – THE HISTORY OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY* feature length documentary. Dir. by Paul G Roberts, 2019.

taboos, and its expressions were used to 'shock' people, to go beyond the boarders of existed norms.

Obviously, women became protagonists of such photographs being subjected to surrealistic ideas of the human body and a female body specifically. In Bourdin's works in particular, the dissection thrives and the female body, wrapped up in bright colors and positioned in constructed environments, becomes this peculiar instrument for attention-drawing.

Guy Bourdin's oeuvre vegetates from objectification. It dismembers a woman's body and uses it as an element of the environment.

Helmut Newton's work, however, is not as blatantly reductive in regards to female form, but it nonetheless contains very destructive implications and connotations.

I remember the time I first visited his retrospective *'Helmut Newton In Dialogue. Fashion and Fictions'* exhibition in Prague, at Museum Kampa (2019). Walking around the exhibition hall I could not help feeling exposed and observed. It felt like my body was put on the surgery table and was meticulously examined. All the ways women were represented in his photographs were cold, alienated and apathetic.

The image of a famous Newton's 'strong and sexy, overbearing and confident' woman has crashed right in front of my eyes when I watched all the models so brutally unmasked to the public. Some of them looked calm, others concerned, but the same unsettling feeling could not leave me whoever I looked at and observed.

However, the moment of the climax of my face-to-face experience with Newton's work happened rather later, when I got to see the documentary that was screened in one of the dark corners of the gallery. It was generally a narration of the period of his later work, his experience in working for the fashion industry and overall methods he was using during his practice. But there was one thing he mentioned, that still haunts me to this day, that became sort of a wake-up call for me.

He said: "If I cut myself off totally from commercial photography like fashion or ads, (I) stop working with models - I cut myself off totally from a *supply* of beautiful women"[15]

Critics still claim that Newton was the one to first introduce an image of a 'strong, fearless, liberated woman'. He himself, as they say, was the one to liberate them and their sexuality, and the one to represent that. Unfortunately, to me these claims still remain a paradox, as I do not believe that someone who treats women as a 'supply' has any agency to represent them, letting alone

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[15] *Helmut Newton: Frames from the Edge* documentary. dir. by Adrian Maben, 1989.

liberating them. However, the origin of objectification and its ramifications come up to the surface.

Newton's approach still exists in works of some contemporary photographers: generations who grew up consuming his photographs and praising his oeuvre inherited, in some way, his vision and brought it even further.

On Scandal: Testino and Richardson, Unwerth and Klein

Looking up the most scandalous campaigns such names as Mario Testino, Ellen von Unwerth, Terry Richardson and Steven Klein would usually come up. I took these four photographers as an example for my analysis, because I believe that they represent Newton's vision carried into the 21st century the best.

Works of these photographers speak for themselves and represent an even more shocking version of what could be found in archives of 70s fashion photography.

One of the most notorious photoshoots that appeared in the 00s was a campaign for Gucci shot by Mario Testino in 2003. The photo shows a young man kneeled in front of a woman (who is represented in the photograph partly, showing only her legs and lower body). Her pubic hair is shaved in the brandmark's logo:

Figure 7: Gucci SS 2003 campaign, shot by Mario Testino

What this photograph connotes is that the brand is literally absorbing the body, owning the body: "Products are being sexualized, people are being objectified.. They merge into the same thing"[16]

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[16] Jhally, Sut., and Jean Kilbourne. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010

The same pattern can be seen in the work of Terry Richardson, specifically in his advertising campaign for Tom Ford:

Figure 8: Tom Ford for Men 2007 fragrance campaign, shot by Terry Richardson

The fragrance bottle is positioned between the legs, substituting the vagina. Since this product is male-oriented, this visual play makes viewers believe in easy accessibility of a woman's body, as if they could walk in and grab it from the store shelf, just like they would with the fragrance bottle. A woman's hand is placed gently on top of the bottle's cap, connoting the resemblance with the clitorus and, in some way, manifesting masturbation.

The placement of sex in this ad is so elaborate, that even though there is playfulness, provocation and seduction that this photograph is trying to sell, yet subconciously this kind of imagery is directed against the consumer, and specifically female-consumer.

This particular advertising caused an enormous backlash in the media at its time in regards to female objectification to which Ford in one of his later interviews reacted with: "I'm an equal opportunity objectifier.. all of us in the fashion industry objectify men and women, we're using the human form to sell products.."

He then also proceeds to mention that he enjoys creating controversy when it comes to visualisations for his products (which supports the argument about 'shock' attribute of the imagery): ".. You're flipping through the magazine, you're selling a man's fragrance, now, where are you gonna put it that a man is gonna look at it and notice? Between a woman's breast! Or between her legs!.."[17]

However, when it comes to Terry Richardson's work - Ford's campaign is most certainly not the first provocative project that he has done. Apart from his unique style of shooting in a snapshot esthetic, he is also generally known for

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[17] *Tom Ford: CNBC Conversations with Tania Bryer*, interview, 2015

the explicitness of his photographs, both in his commercial and personal practice.

Another controversial campaign, for instance, that got banned from all the major fashion magazines and media platforms was the one he shot for Sisley, in 2001 featuring the American model Josie Maran:

Figure 9: SISLEY 2001, shot by Terry Richardson

Maran is portrayed with a cow udder in her hand and a squirt of milk directed right at her face - the reference to male ejaculation in this photograph is unbelievably obvious. Therefore, not only this type of imagery connotes a very submissive role of a woman (In regards to this particular campaign, taking into account that Sisley mostly produces women's wear, making women their main targeting group, I would not feel comfort or respect towards me as their buyer while looking at this campaign) but it also normalizes the 'scandal', making the public addicted to it and always asking for more.

Exactly as Susan Sontag wrote in her famous 'On Photography' about war documentaries, the same principal works in the advertising and fashion photography of our time - "Photographs shock insofar as they show something novel. Unfortunately the ante keeps getting raised, partly through proliferation of such images of horror."[18]

Interestingly enough, women photographers also learned to adapt the male gaze and "Newton's vision" producing the imagery, dictated by male-dominated profession. One of such is well-known German fashion photographer Ellen von Unwerth. Most of her photographs' main characters are women presented in group portraits or individual ones, usually filled with bright colors, very contrasty light and a lot of props. As group portraits are usually executed in a documentary way, it gives an impression of perpetual partying, careless way of

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[18] Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books, 1977. p.14

living and constantly present fun when it comes to her characters. However, looking deeper into the pictures, something uncanny starts coming up to the surface of the image. The power relation in her imagery is brought to the extreme: the domineering characters in her series are presented as strong, violent, aggressive, whereas submissive ones are usually displayed as bodies, objects for others' pleasure (to simply put it - objectified and fetishized). Encounters between these characters are very aggressive, dramatic. Surprisingly, as opposed to Testino or Richardson, there is a lot of direct representation of violence in Unwerth's photographs (I am not trying to argue that it is not present in the photographs of the first two, only in Unwerth's images it is more prominent, closer to the surface). In the act of photographing, her models are slapped, pushed, spanked or even chained. What makes her images particularly disturbing is the characters' very pronounced and exaggerated face expressions. As if they would be pantomime performers. The most dangerous thing about her imagery is that it somehow equates violence to fun. Such visual message can have a very harmful subconscious effect on viewers and normalize violence against women in particular. Nevertheless, it has spread across all the contemporary media platforms and is being promoted in the fashion industry. Ellen von Unwerth, nevertheless, is not the only photographer to use connotations of violence in her practice.

Figure 10: Shot by Ellen von Unwerth

Another photographer who uses similar language is Steven Klein. He is famous for his dark photographic series filled with roughness and ferocity. Unlike Unwerth, his images are evidently staged and meticulously constructed. His work stands out by its straightforwardness, his models are captured usually in extremely strong, tense poses. Klein likewise can be considered a master of shocking: his works are not infrequently involved in a lot of scandals in the fashion industry. For instance, this campaign shot by him for Dolce Gabbana received an enormous backlash as an obvious representation of a gang rape:

Figure 11: Dolce Gabbana SS 2007 campaign, shot by Steven Klein

The helpless female model is being brought to the ground and held by one of the male models, as if she would have been attacked. Her face expression does not reflect any positive emotions or pleasure, while other male models surrounding her are excitedly watching her struggle.

The biggest hazard of similar advertising is the fact that such big names in the fashion industry like Dolce Gabbana are endorsing it. As we already figured, that advertising sells not only a product, but a certain lifestyle and promotes specific behaviours, we can imagine the harmful influence it can have on our mental health (both on women's and man's).

V. Repercussions of Objectification

While analyzing the strategies and methods fashion and advertising imagery is being created with, let us now look at the other side: analyze how exactly we as consumers react to these visual representations and how it affects our behaviours, mentality and life in general.

First and foremost, women and men read imagery described above very differently. Not, obviously, because they want to, but because of the way it was programmed for one or another specifically. If we look at the patterns of advertising's functionings, there is a very specific allocation of the power roles that we are expected to fulfill.

Men are encouraged to dominate. They are usually represented as powerful, strong, sovereign figures. Their body language differs completely from that of women often promoting violent and hazardous behaviours. Surprisingly enough, while researching the influence modern advertising has on people, Jean Killbourne noticed that "Most men are not violent.. but many men are afraid to speak up, are afraid to support women and are afraid to challenge

other men."[19] Even taking into account that violence is not inherent to men, by being consistently exposed to imagery analyzed above, they are urged to be toxically masculine, to treat women as inferior and objectify them. However, it harms them as much in their own same-sex encounters: it creates a challenge for authority, for which men must constantly prove their confidence and power over the inferior to each other. The idea of a truly masculine man in our society is of a one who is never vulnerable. Boys are pressured into hiding their emotions and are judged whenever they make any attempts to express their feminine side.

In its turn, women are taught to be submissive, to satisfy the male gaze and be available, to be obsessed with their own appearance. Through overusing and vulgarizing sex, expressions of women's sexuality in advertising is presented in a very limited and primitive way. "They (ads) create a climate in which women are often seen as things, as objects. And, certainly, turning a human being into a thing is almost always a first step towards justifying violence against that person"[20]

Coming back to Tom Ford's interview about the way he is advertising his products, he mentions that "It (visuals) is there to make you dream.. it is a kind of a representation of an idyllic.. It is an impressionistic view and as a fashion designer you sort of create that dream world"[21]

This quote is particularly unsettling as, talking about fashion advertising in general, such an influential designer idealizes violence and dangerous attitudes towards women in fashion imagery and considers it to be a part of a fashion 'dream world'.

Similar attitudes in advertising and fashion industries, as well as in various media are manifestations of rape culture. Generally, rape culture is socially constructed environment that is present in all of the cultural fields all over the world on different levels and that encourages a strict separation of gender roles and normalization of rape. Now, that does not mean that all the men in the world are rapists or are certainly meant to become such, however, social and cultural environment they grow up in trivializes rape in visual representations. Of course, one might argue that women can be rapists too, although what we face in everyday encounters with the media usually proves the opposite as most women are presented as inferior and submissive.

[19] Jhally, Sut., and Jean Kilbourne. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010
[20] Jhally, Sut., and Jean Kilbourne. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010
[21] *Tom Ford: CNBC Conversations with Tania Bryer*, interview, 2015

Self-objectification

Faced with similar views and attitudes towards themselves, women start doubting themselves under an enormous social and media pressure. That, in turn, results into, perhaps, the most dangerous phenomenon which is generally a main cause for a lot of insecurities, anxiety, depression and a whole range of other serious mental health issues amongst the majority of women. A severe repercussion of proliferation of inconsiderate representations of a woman's body - self objectification.

We adapt to the current visual environment by internalizing the objectifying gaze. We start to look at ourselves very differently from a very early age, always asking whether we are good enough, or how much we resemble the ideal. Not only others, but we evaluate ourselves in comparison to what is dictated to us by advertisers.

Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts did a major research on objectification in 1997, explaining how exactly objectification, and specifically, self-objectification functions in the daily lives of women. The fascinating thing about self-objectification is that it instigates them to habitually monitor the outward appearance of their body bringing self-consciousness to a new level. We become vigilant of the way we look or behave in order to follow the existing standards of what a woman should be. Although, not only they are highly intricate, but also very self-contradictory. For instance, in the Western society, if a girl or a woman is very reserved, shy or scrupulous she is likely to be jokingly called a "prude", or "nun".

I have had enough experience of my own in encounters with men (and I think that, quite frankly, a lot of women would be familiar with this) where I would be called out for not being 'fun enough to hang out with' or 'a pussy' because I would refuse to take drugs under peer pressure or have one-night stands with guys I barely now.

However, as soon as she starts behaving or dressing in a more up front, more free manner, be more open with her sexuality or, in general, be more honest and direct regarding her needs or desires she might be faced with a lot of negative comments about how "bossy" or too "frivolous" she is. Stereotypes created by the media start affecting our social and personal life as we and people around us tend to associate each other with given visual representations.

This is taught to us from a very young age: girls are being silenced and deprived of the agency to represent themselves, to express themselves in their own unique way. Many of the existing labels related to women that society puts on us result in obsession about self-control. We are encouraged to constantly be self-conscious. "The habitual self-conscious body monitoring that results

from self-objectification might be best viewed as a strategy many women develop to help determine how other people will treat them, which has clear implications for their quality of life"[22]

Thinking of how much is determined by and dependent on the way we as women look, "beauty" (which is inherently very subjective) became a sort of currency for exchanging our outward appearance on such things as success, comfort or even safety in different areas of our daily life. "Physical attractiveness has also been shown to correlate more highly with popularity, dating experience, and marriage opportunities for women than for men"[23] Nevertheless, our look has an 'exchange value' only in case of it complying with standards set by dominant (generally, white hetero male) culture. Therefore women who belong to various minorities might experience objectification on a different level depending on age, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. Fredrickson and Roberts describe objectification directed at white hetero women as 'positively valenced admiration' (when dominant culture approves of you, while still considering inferior), whereas objectification forwarded to women of color, older women or lesbians as 'negatively valenced social evaluations'. It clearly says something about what women of different groups might experience and how differently it affects their social and mental life.

Objectification theory suggests four major consequences of self-objectification which are *shame*, *anxiety*, *inability to reach peak motivational states* and *loss of connection with internal bodily states*.

Even though in the research these concepts are described separately as four independent components of self-objectification, they are clearly closely related and functioning as a whole (different combinations of which later result into serious mental health issues). It starts with the 'toxic' shame, as a result of being unable to reach the impossible ideal that culture is imposing on us. "Shame generates an intense desire to hide, to escape a painful gaze of others, to disappear alongside feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness"[24]. In its turn, it provokes a creeping anxiety, whenever we think we are being observed or evaluated. We become extremely vigilant, almost paranoid about the way we might appear to others. Objectification theory calls it an 'appearance anxiety'. However there is an even darker side of anxiety which is related to safety.

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[22] Fredrickson, Barbara L., Roberts, Tomi-Ann. *Objectification Theory. Towards Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*; Psychology of Women Quarterly 21, 1997; p. 180

[23] Fredrickson, Barbara L., Roberts, Tomi-Ann. *Objectification Theory. Towards Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*; Psychology of Women Quarterly 21, 1997; p. 178

[24] Fredrickson, Barbara L., Roberts, Tomi-Ann. *Objectification Theory. Towards Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*; Psychology of Women Quarterly 21, 1997; p. 181

Taking into account that, unfortunately, we live in a world in which 81% of women get sexually harassed on a daily basis (according to non-profit organization *Stop Street Harassment (SSH)* in 2018) and our safety is constantly undermined by the possibility of rape. "Those who suggest that a female victim of sexual assault "asked for it" often refer to her physical appearance … Emperical studies demonstrate that more attractive rape victims are assigned greater blame for their own rape than less attractive victims"[25]. When objectification appears to be an obvious component of sexual violence it is still rewarded in the society.

Thereafter, if self-monitoring and anxiety connected to it take so much energy, time and focus, women lose the ability to fully engage in various activities to reach so-called motivational peak states. They are important specifically for our mental health as they bring the feeling of achievement and overpowering one's self when it comes to intellectual or physical challenges. Unfortunately, since our attention is so drawn to our outer appearance, we cannot properly focus or engage in any vital activities that help us make ourselves feel fulfilled.

As our sense of worth decays and anxiety flourishes, we lose inner connection to our bodily states. "Because women are vigilantly aware of their outer bodily appearance, they may be left with fewer perceptual resources available for attending to inner body experience".[26]

Moreover, it does not spread only to our inner emotional state and relationship with our inner world, but also very much connects to physical sensations. That, in its turn, affects women's sexual life resulting into depression and sexual dysfunction. In addition, the loss of sensitivity on a physical level is provoked as a repercussion of body-based shame and various body modifications (plastic surgeries, facial injections etc) "Most women who have breast implants lose sensation in their breasts, so their breast becomes an object of someone else's pleasure, rather than being pleasurable in themselves"[27]

These consequences in sum form an extremely unhealthy environment that prejudice against women for their entire lives: it appears at a workplace, in interpersonal and social encounters, in media. It is almost impossible to avoid potentially objectifying contexts.

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[25] Fredrickson, Barbara L., Roberts, Tomi-Ann. *Objectification Theory. Towards Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*; Psychology of Women Quarterly 21, 1997; p. 182

[26] Fredrickson, Barbara L., Roberts, Tomi-Ann. *Objectification Theory. Towards Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*; Psychology of Women Quarterly 21, 1997; p. 185

[27] Jhally, Sut., and Jean Kilbourne. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010

<u>Magazines</u>

Since fashion and beauty magazines are taking up a lot of the media space, they are one of the biggest platforms for proliferating and thriving of objectification.
They consequently provoke self-objectification as magazines are mostly targeted at women. "Why do women care so much what the magazines say and show? They care because, though the magazines are trivialized, they represent something very important: women's mass culture"[28]. The same magazines are also the ones to promote the Beauty Myth (which objectification appears to be a part of and which I described earlier) that Naomi Wolf talks about in her book. It encourages wariness of one another and contributes not only to self-vigilance, but vigilance of other women's appearance that respectively results in more anxiety, unhealthy intercomparisons and jealousy. We become competitors for the "main prize" - the best resemblance of the ideal. We lose integrity by chasing unrealistic values and characteristics just to get extra praise from modern culture. "The healthier the industry, the sicker are women's consumer and civil rights"[29]
Not only, however, printed publications influence us, but also, with popularisation of social media, a lot of magazines went into online mode to widen their audiences: instagram accounts of such publications like Vogue or Vanity Fair have an astounding reach of 26,7 million and 5,4 million followers respectively (end of April 2020). Even bigger hazard is the fact that social media and online platforms allow advertisers to not only use still photographic imagery (like in printed publications), but also work with sound and video materials. Modern-day social media and the internet in general are becoming the united platform for us to consume ads (as opposed to TV, radio, magazines etc. separately). In comparison to the 70s, where people used to see around 500 ads in a day, contemporary researchers estimate that we are being exposed to approximately 4,000 to 10,000 ads daily nowadays (according to *Forbes* magazine, 2017). That not only proves, once again, that we are under an enormous influence of advertising companies, but also the point of Fredrickson and Roberts on the almost complete impossibility of escaping the objectifying gaze.

Magazines are the main mediators between objectification and self-objectification. Due to the extensive use of Photoshop and other

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[28] Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. William Morrow & Co. 1991, p. 70
[29] Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. William Morrow & Co. 1991, p.82

image-manipulating software, they erase any signs of age or imperfection on faces and bodies. Older women, bigger women, women of color and other various intersections of women's social groups and minorities are getting excluded and deprived of representation therefore not being able to present themselves as a part of the culture.

Similar comments to 'You are too ugly! You do not even look like a woman' or 'You are too fat! Put on more clothes and hide your body' on social media are often provoked by comparison to the set of given standards that are unspokenly spread across the glossy pages (or bright screens). However, thinking into the core of these phrases - they barely make sense. Again, beauty and thus ugliness are extremely subjective concepts. Even taking into account that we are being fed very one-sided imagery from an early age does not make it valid. We just get used to it and later are unable to accept anything else that visually does not resemble the existing ideal. There is no particular way a woman should look. There is no such thing as 'too fat' (here I would like to clarify that I am not trying to support things such as severe obesity which of course is a problem and can put one's life in danger. What I am willing to convey is perception of 'fat' as a social construct, basically, anybody who does not bear the resemblance to the ideal body type).

Our appearance is a very diverse and complex thing which gets trivialized and simplified through the prism of the media and advertising.

VI. New Vision

Traditional fashion and advertising photography and imagery created by it will undoubtedly remain an immense part of the history. Conventional representation of women promoting objectification will still be used in various ways, because, as the history and experience showed, it sells and it does so very well. As long as it keeps the cash flowing to the advertisers we will still observe it appearing on various visual platforms. However since *"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"* and similar prominent researches on oppression of women in mass media began to get published (Kimberle Crenshaw on Intersectionality (1989), *"Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions"* (1983) by Gloria Steinem, *"Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women"* (1991) by Susan Faludi and others) it became quite evident that standards established by the dominant culture are not so stable and quite faulty in its core. Now, nobody said that it would be easy to dismantle those, nevertheless carrying out a heavy load of high (and mostly unrealistic) expectations and double standards, women began to realise that it might be the right time to get a hold of the situation. Whatever unpleasant consequences of objectification have taken its place largely across many women's lives it has and still is teaching us: taking a look at the Third Wave Feminism appearing in

the 90s and further time period up until now can help us see positive change in representation of women in fashion and advertising industries.

The time of censorship, exclusion and alienation in the visual culture is slowly fading away letting the younger generation of photographers at the forefront make remarkable advances, bring changes and fight for equal representation.

Intimacy, inclusion and freedom of representation

Let us now compare these two images:

Figure 12: 'Sie Kommen', Helmut Newton (1981)

Figure 13: Universal Standard campaign shot by Ronan McKenzie, 2019

Both are group portraits of women, yet the feeling we get from each of them is completely different, almost opposite of one another. In the photograph shot by Newton, the models are strictly positioned in space. Their body language is

very enclosed. They all look tense, focused and even hostile. Although they stand so close, they feel very distant both from the viewer and each other. The photograph is saturated with alienation. None of the models look into the camera. They are drifting somewhere in their thoughts, almost letting their actual presence slip away.

Whereas, almost the sense of healing comes to us when we shift our sight to the second image - the photograph of a young british fashion photographer Ronan McKenzie shot for american brand Universal Standard. Not only their body language is different here: all the models are more relaxed, they are standing close to each other, leaning against each other, letting their natural bodily flow appear, but also, we immediately notice how vastly diverse their appearance is.

They are all of different body type and color, they differ in look and pose. Evidently in some part directed by the photographer, these models still had freedom to represent themselves. They all look into the camera and mark their presence. It almost feels like they are saying 'We are here. We stand together' to the viewer. Their look is strong, though very soft and peaceful at the same time.

This is exactly what inspires me in the works of younger photographers. Their strive for change and progressive vision. Analyzing works of several of them, I have noted three main components they are bringing to contemporary fashion imagery, which are intimacy, inclusion and freedom of representation.

Intimacy

In my opinion, as a photographer, it is extremely important to first and foremost build a connection with your model. Create a comfortable and safe environment to be able to open up to each other in order to work productively and come up with something incredible together. Photographers such as Carlota Guerrero are including high doses of intimacy in their images and building their practice upon it.

"Born in Barcelona. Self-taught, Carlota first started taking photographs as a young teenager. She is known for work that often combines photography or filmmaking with her own art direction and choreography. Her first major commission was collaborating with the singer-songwriter Solange on the artwork and art direction of the videos for the singer's acclaimed "A Seat at the Table" album. This collaborative work continued when she teamed up with the poet Rupi Kaur to art direct a live performance of Kaur's poems in New York. She has collaborated with global brands such as Nike, Givenchy, Dior and regularly contributes to titles such as Vogue Spain, Numero, Porter, and Fader" ('We Folk' Creative Talent management)

Her works are very boldly feminine and extremely intimate. They are usually composed in very soft, pastel colors with a highly aesthetic approach. What I find very important in her photographs is that they are about looking at a woman's body in an opposite way that society is used to. She is introducing the new approach to subverting devouring male gaze and bringing in the delicate and careful way of coherently looking at and seeing through. Guerrero is considered to be one of the representatives of the Female Gaze: by depicting women beyond traditional gender strictures, she is breaking the frames of the male gaze, therefore removing potentially objectifying contexts. The intimacy between her models is usually very self-evident: she brings their deep connection as women, as female beings to the photographic surface. Her photographs sometimes remind the historical images of indigineous tribes - they represent unity and collectiveness. Models might see each other for the first time on set, but the final image makes us believe that they are bonded.

Figure 14: Shot by Carlota Guerrero

Inclusion

Looking at the traditional fashion imagery - we can conclude that it is very much based on exclusion. If a woman does not resemble the supermodel from the glossy pages of Vogue or Harper's Bazaar she is automatically excluded from experiencing feelings of comfort, beauty or sexuality. ".. In advertising and the popular culture sexuality belongs only to the young and beautiful. If you are not

young and perfect looking - you have no sexuality. And this makes most people less desirable. How sexy can a woman feel if she hates her body?"[30] Obviously we can argue that lately various fashion brands, magazines and advertisers started hiring plus-size models to star in the campaigns for promoting their products. However, it is still the same strategy, only on the other side of the extreme. A lot of women are existing right between these two extremes, still being highly underrepresented.

Not only exclusion spreads over the body types, but also age and ethnicity. That is why it is extremely important to show diversity. We are trying to fit ourselves into the body that only 5% of the world's population of women possess naturally. Women should be able to relate themselves to the image when they come into the store to buy clothing or makeup. They should see wrinkles, stretch marks and body hair as there is nothing more natural and real. Advertisers should not encourage us to be something we are not, but rather show us to accept ourselves in our uniqueness and diversity.

Freedom of Representation

Progressive vision is about breaking established rules and taboos. It is about freedom of visual representation. Photographers like Harley Weir are a great example of exposing something that society banned from any representations, especially something inherently female like motherhood or menstruation (as it cannot be a part of 'ideal female' according to existing standards). Young, but already very prominent in her field, Weir is embracing body fluids, stretch marks, body hair and is capturing the physical experience of a human body in general. She is escalating naturalism and humanity in women she photographs. Her bold, straightforward images are showcasing the true beauty of being a woman. Though, however bold they are, intimacy is still present in them, revealing the connection of photographer and a model (as opposed to Newton's work for instance)

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[30] Jhally, Sut., and Jean Kilbourne. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010

Figure 15: Harley Weir for The Female Gaze issue of i-D magazine, 2016

I think one of the greatest misconceptions in fashion photography is that a photographer has a full agency of representing a model in any context or situation.

If we take Newton's approach to imagemaking, it usually includes very meticulous staging of the photograph and overbearing control of the photographer. It is generally considered that a photographer is a key figure in the image-making process (as shown in the "*Helmut Newton: Frames from the Edge"* documentary). However, it seems like contemporary photographers have included more of a documentary practice in the work, giving a certain freedom to model and splitting the role of the 'image-maker'. So, the model is as much of an image-maker as a photographer. It is also important to mention that, especially with fashion photography, there is a lot of teamwork involved. Stylists, makeup artists, set designers and producers are all contributing to the final image. Cult of the photographer as the 'star' of the shoot is slowly fading away into history.

It is collaboration that lets the magic happen. The model has the agency to represent herself as the photographer captures it in their own unrepeatable way.

A few words on contemporary fashion publications

The platform for progressive imagery (like a few examples described above) is mostly existing thanks to social media or younger (mostly starting out as

underground or online-based) publications like i-D magazine, Dazed, LOVE, AnOther, Schön! and many others.

The distinctive characteristic of magazines of similar league is that even though they all present themselves mostly as fashion publications, they also strongly focus on culture and youth culture specifically. They allow young artists, photographers, stylists and other creators to collaborate and provide them with the platform for their visual expression. They also help tackle and raise awareness of problems such are global climate change, mental health issues, visibility of various minorities and many more. They encourage young people to take action and inspire them to advocate for what is really important. I would say i-D and Dazed specifically are undoubtedly at the forefront of revolutionizing the fashion industry and providing positive change to the communities and cultures all over the world.

VII. Conclusion

As the research has shown, objectification indeed might have taken its toll on modern culture. It is rooted in male gaze and sexual fetishism as well as in commodity fetishism and dissection. The objectifying gaze and contexts have been cultivated and supported in both fashion and advertising industries for most of the second half of the 20th century. A lot of fashion editors, designers and advertisers make choices in favor of money and reject any responsibility when it comes to frustrating consequences of their viewers and consumers existing in toxic visual environments. We could also observe how exactly objectification functions in some given examples and what information it provides for our subconsciousness (*figure 2*). Through meticulous analysis of the works of most prominent photographers of the past decades such as Newton and Bourdin we can clearly see a certain visual style based on objectification that has been worked out and carried on into modernity. By further analysis of works of photographers' generation who grew up on Newton's and Bourdain's imagery, it becomes apparent that objectification was taken to even further extreme by promoting dangerous behaviours and contributing to normalisation of violence against women. However subconsciously, it is still undermining women's mental health resulting in self-objectification, which in its turn, can be a trigger for depression, sexual dysfunction or eating disorders.

On a brighter side, a lot of young photographers nowadays are doing their best to subvert the male gaze and eradicate objectification in fashion and advertising imagery. Supported by young independent publications, they are creating realistic representations of women implementing intimacy and inclusion in their works.

In our turn, we, as viewers and consumers, should be aware of the way visual systems of representations work and advocate for equal realistic representations and mental health. By doing so, we can and should make a positive shift in our lives and the way we exist in society. We can also most definitely change the way society sees and treats women by making real women and their struggles visible. We are all equal human beings and the existence of each one of us is valid. So why not let artistic means such as photography become a tool for understanding and supporting each other, spreading affirmative visual messages and making positive change.

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