Chapter 8

Fashion Photography, Phallocentrism, and Feminist Critique

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The photograph in black and white depicts a woman and a man. She is next to naked, dressed only in a bra and a tong, and she lays spread over the hover of a car. Her head is turned away from the onlooker and she seems immobile. Around her neck is a man’s silk tie. She has been strangled, but looks nothing like a real victim of strangulation: she has no blue marks, her facial skin looks perfect, and there is no sign of battle. The man, dressed in an immaculate suit, stands behind her, holding the other end of the tie. He looks straight into the camera, as if saying, ‘See, I killed her.’

Description of an ad for the male bespoke brand Duncan Quinn (Fall 2010)

There are excellent reasons for this refusal of the woman to look, not the least of which is that she is often asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation, and murder.


The opening of this article, a description of a recent ad for Duncan Quinn, is used to visualize the sexism and misogyny inherent in many representations emanating from the fashion industry. Oddly, it is not until one describes them with words, and in that way visually and verbally deconstruct them, that one starts to see them for what they are; so indifferent, so blind, has one become to the aesthetics of fashion imagery that one no longer reacts to representations of dominance and sexual violence. This is, of course, highly problematic. The quotation following the description is used to further visualize this misogyny and the indifference toward it: film scholar Linda Williams’s thirty-year-old critique—the article was originally published in 1984—is used as a reminder not only of how sexual violence toward women is the basis of popular cinema (and most of popular culture), but that its audience—i.e., its spectators and consumers—ought not refuse to look, to become indifferent, but rather, to start looking. Serving a male chauvinist and clearly misogynist discourse within which women are continuously being sexually objectified and dehumanized, fashion (as well as other) representations need to be questioned, discussed, and critiqued. Instead of looking the other way, avoiding discomfort, nausea, anger, one has to start to look, and through the act of really looking, to see the representations for what they really are.

This article emerges out of a rather extensive teaching experience in both film and fashion studies within higher education. As a film scholar teaching film theory, the image has for long been central to any analysis carried out in the classroom, and as a fashion scholar
teaching representations of fashion, I have found that the fashion image has continued to occupy center stage. I have taught interpretations and ways of reading images by engaging in questions regarding representation and by using feminist studies, black studies, white studies, and queer studies as theoretical frameworks. However, some scholars, while critiquing the representations and the sexist messages that these images convey, have placed little emphasis on considering any possible ‘reality’, that is, the actual situation in which the images for intellectual analysis have been created, formed, and shaped.

This focus on the image and what it represents has also informed my own writing. Having written about feminist and queer film theory for over a decade, in particular representations of women and queers within specific genres of films, or even specific films, I have never tried to engage with the actual situation on the film set. Formed by film studies as a discipline, and in particular, by feminist film theory, my own research has been in line with a longstanding engagement with film as text.

Within fashion studies, an emerging field that grasps both the humanities and the social sciences, approaches informed by ethnographical research and methods are not only welcome, but also required. Although an investigative focus on the image and what it represents is needed, for this inquiry to really mean something, there is a need to also look at the ‘reality’ behind the images, that is, what the images are snapshots of in terms of working conditions and working relations for the agents within the business. Maybe by leaning toward organization or management studies, and by using a more ethnographically formed approach, there is a possibility of going beyond the very image.

Organization studies have shown an increasing interest in the booming organizations of the ‘new’ entertainment economy, yet organizational researchers still tend to focus their attention on organizations in mainstream sectors such as banking, information technology, and automobile manufacturing—and not on fashion (or film). On its part, film studies has tended to ignore the film industry’s production processes altogether, focusing instead on film as art form or film as representation. (This said, there is an evolving field within the field of film studies called ‘production studies’, but to my knowledge this is an un-gendered field). On the whole, little attention has therefore been given to the actual film set and to the development of hierarchical interpersonal relations between different kinds of employees (actors, actresses, director(s), producer(s), stage hands, costume designer(s), etc.). Although feminist film theory has been highly occupied with Woman on film, very little research has been carried out, as pointed out above, in regards to women on the film set. Sadism and misogyny inform popular film production, and many feminist scholars have correctly argued that the cinematic image and narration is one of sadism, and that this representation is always in favor of Man, never of Woman, nor of women (Mulvey 1975; de Lauretis 1984). However, the field needs to welcome a scholarship that strives to lay bare the sadism and misogyny inherent in film production, criticizing a film theory which for decades has refused to look at the gendered reality of employees in the film industry. The intricate relations between film as representation and the working conditions of film production could be studied drawing on previous research on women (and men) in
organizations (e.g., Acker 1992; Acker 1989; Calás and Smircich 1992; Calás and Smircich 1996; and Calás 2008).

For example, it is common knowledge that film actresses have been mistreated and violated on the film set; famous examples are Debbie Reynolds in *How the West Was Won* (Henry Hathaway, 1962), Tippi Hedren in *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), and Susan George in *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971). Yet film studies and management studies alike have—so far—shown next to no interest in this. When engaging with biographical notes and interviews by the actresses in the above mentioned films, actresses who have dared to come forward to tell their story of domination and exploitation, it becomes clear that these films not only represent sexual violence and other forms of violence—but that the film sets in which these films were made also did violence to the women (Williams 1995; Spoto 1999; Kermode 2003; Barker 2006; Simkin 2011).

### An Image Is an Image Is an Image

Representations are not just representations (Dyer 1993)—they come from somewhere and refer to and visualize real acts. Acts that are carried out on the screen, then, are not just fantasies; in order for them to be represented, they have to be presented and carried out, and hence, violence—sexual or other—toward women characters on film is also carried out toward women in film. And this is made possible by the gendered organizational relations of the film industry. The context can be studied by consulting biographical sources and interviews, by examining heated debates in various film journals and magazines, and by analyzing specific scenes. This means studying situational practices and their gendered relations and structures. Film not only as representation, as pure fiction, but as a situational practice in time and space, involving many people and unequal relationships between the people engaged in the filmmaking. Through the examination of biographical sources and interviews, it becomes apparent that voyeurism, sadism, and misogyny—since the early 1970s considered as the main ingredients of mainstream cinema by foremost feminist film scholars and historians—are also inscribed in the acts and relations of filmmaking. In these documents, filmmaking is often recalled in a very negative manner as an experience that is clearly exploitive and degrading (see, e.g., Williams 1995; Kermode 2003; Simkin 2011). In some cases, the experience was forced upon the actresses by what they felt was the entire film team, mostly consisting of men, and hence, and, in some cases, clearly against their will.

This imbalance and this open exploitation are, of course, made possible by the gendered organizational relations of the film industry, which is indeed a male-dominated industry. Most directors as narrators, *metteurs-en-scène*, and as the so-called ‘voices of God’ (see Nichols 1991) are—as we know—male; and further, male actors often play the main characters, often with some degree of both sadism and misogyny; and woman actors often play objectified and secondary characters, not seldom occupying a masochist
position. Even in films with an active female protagonist, she is often objectified and put in degrading positions—for the viewers’ pleasure. The film text, then, follows strict rules of female punishment: she is to be punished, physically and mentally, for wanting to be an active subject. Often this punishment is also of a sexual nature: hence, rape, and the threat of rape. Stevie Simkin is clear about the sexualized and unequal relations structuring the film industry when describing *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) as a prime example of how male centered the industry is:

The rape scene in *Straw Dogs* exists within a tightly controlled male environment: written by men, enforced on a reluctant young actress isolated and in fear of Peckinpah’s capacity for humiliating and intimidating his actors…in a Hollywood that (still) demands that its stars meet certain standards of conventional beauty, and that they obediently parade it for their audiences, the rape scene of Amy on screen, and the ordeal Susan George endured behind the scenes, is one of the clearest illustrations of the dominant, persistent, controlling male hand over the industry. (Simkin 2011: 15)

As pointed out above, one would have expected that feminist film theory, which for more than forty years has held a central and most significant position within film studies, should have engaged with this unequal relation. It has, for sure, been relentless in its strive to uncover the misogyny of cinematic representation, yet, it has not really dared to examine the actual situation of real women on the film set: it has not dared to extricate itself from the tangle of the often highly theoretical discussions and analysis of film, which is an analysis that only considers women as signifiers, symbols, or theoretical concepts within the narrative structure of film. But the sadist, misogynist, and voyeuristic treatment of women characters, convincingly argued by Marjorie Rosen (1973), Molly Haskell ([1974] 1987), Laura Mulvey (1975), and Teresa de Lauretis (1984), is not only there on the screen: it is also staged, and carried out, as the film is being shot. The film set, then, is a space where violence toward women is carried out—under the prerequisite of making movies, and, at times, art.

Throughout film history, male and female actors alike have been injured on the set: male actors have fallen off their horses, breaking an arm or a leg, or they have missed a jump in action and broken their neck—but most often in action scenes in which they have been active subjects. Female actors, on the other hand, have been injured in different ways—and these ways have often been indeed sadistic and almost always sexualized and sexist. Violence, whether sexual or not, is carried out toward women on screen and on the set, positions women as passive, as subordinated, and as helpless. And yes, there is reason to believe that this not only applies to the film context: but to all contexts in which women appear as—is indistinguishable from—*Image* (Doane 1982) and men as controller of the object and of the gaze, and in which the narrative structure and the visualization of gender is highly sexualized, as well as dependent on the idea of sexual difference as natural and desirable.
**Woman—Still—as Image**

The ad shows a white naked woman spread out over a velvet cushion on her back, her knees bent and spreading her legs. The background is velvety black and together with the sharp light it makes her white skin painfully white. She wears golden slippers with high heels and a thick gold necklace, her face is carefully made up and her red curly hair is perfectly placed on the cushion. She is touching her breasts, her head thrown back, and her eyes closed. She seems immobile—yet her facial expression gives away pleasure. She looks like a living dead: bit by a vampire, killed by an overdose, or ready for sex.

Description of an ad for the perfume Opium from Yves Saint Laurent (late 1990s)

And so, by the help of the above described famous ad for the perfume Opium, the view is now switched to another field that produces representations that are characterized by, and come out of, an unequal gender structure. This field is, just like cinema, fueled by the obsession with Image(s) and with phallocentric sexuality.

And just like with the film industry and its representations, this is a field not really dealt with from a critical standpoint. Feminist theory has not really bothered with the fashion industry and with fashion photography from a standpoint that uncovers the fictionalization of the fashion image. In 2005, Sheila Jeffreys writes that ‘It has become unpopular since the 1980s,…to point out that fashion reflects and serves to maintain female subordination’ (Jeffreys 2005: 87). Well, fashion not only reflects and maintain this subordination: it also orchestrates it as well as thrives on it, making it not only ‘sexy’, but also *comme-il-faut*. Academics in the field of fashion studies—teaching fashion and researching fashion—ought to dare become more critical, if not political, with the risk of becoming unpopular as Jeffreys states. The business and the phenomenon studied is one thriving on and producing a blatant gender inequality, and this is something that academics must take into consideration. For sure, there are many more aspects of the fashion industry that academics ought to engage in and critically study: the unequal working hierarchies; the exploitation of workers in the garment industry; child labor, and the overall unequal relation between Western world and the non-Western world in terms of production and the use of natural resources. Yet, for this piece, it is the critique of unequal gender relations and the sexist and at times sadistic representation of women that in fashion is being fictionalized into Image that is being brought up to the forefront.

The discussion of the power of images has been crucial to most representation theory coming out of a cultural studies perspective, and this angle has opened up the at times overly theoretical standpoint within feminist film theory. And yet, the connection between an actual situation and its representation, has not been focused upon. Images are representations of a constructed reality, yes. Even documentary images are to a certain extent staged and constructed, as has been argued by film scholars Bill Nichols (1991) and Michael Renov (1993) and fiction always contains non-fictive elements, as has been argued by Vivian Sobshack (1984; 2004). Images present and re-present the ‘real’, but can never
fully represent it. Yet, what is seen in images, what is represented, are representations of something that at the time of the shot was very real, real for the people involved. The event is staged, and we may assume that roles are played: but they are played out, and the setting, at least within the mainstream, is often one depending on a certain power imbalance with sexual connotations and/or expressions presented as desirable. This imbalance could be called heteronormativity—a power structure upholding heterosexuality as norm while relying on the notion of sexual difference as natural and necessary. An example of this is a Tom Ford spectacles advertisement from 2010 (shot by Terry Richardson), which shows a completely naked woman in high heels ironing a pair of men’s pants and next to her, reading a paper, stands a man dressed in shirt, bow tie and jacket, boxer shorts, and high socks. While the picture can be read as ironic in terms of a possible critique of heteronormativity, it is still overtly sexualized and heterosexist. No matter the possible irony and critique, the woman, in her nakedness, is still available (if only to the gaze), and she is still serving (the male). He is still covered, only the lower part of his thighs showing, and he is engaged in an activity for his own pleasure, reading the papers, while waiting for her to serve him his ironed trousers.

Academics within the fields dealing with visual culture in various forms—film, fashion, photography, and art—are trained to read images, to interpret them, and ask about their meanings—and more than often to try to counter-read them to open up for valid and critical and theoretical interpretations. So well-trained are we, that even when encountering an image that we may find highly offensive, we try to re-read it so as to find some other meaning, and that other meaning is often colored with irony and satire. The most offensive image, in our eyes, can become a critique of what it is representing. Irony and satire function as a shield, and as proof of an intellectual capacity of re-reading. And this shield, our best students are expected to develop and carry as well.

Academic analysis, while astute and correct, is in fact a distancing from the image: and this distance works as a protection against seeing the images for what they are—and the unequal gender relations that they portray. In this way, the Duncan advertisement, described above, can be read as a ironic visual quotation of some innocent yet gaudy S&M representation of classic horror cinema, of exclusive underwear advertisement (like the French brand Aubade or the Italian brand La Perla), or of nineteenth-century Western art. When relating it to other images, demonstrating that representations are always re-presentations of earlier representations, they become harmless—and often, humorous and witty. We tell ourselves that it is all about play, and we applaud ourselves when we manage to discover their (possible) references. And, again, we fool ourselves of seeing them only as constructed images and not as the outcome of real situations.

Yet, these images are ‘a relentless parade of insults’ (Dyer 1993: 1). Further, they are part of a misogynist discourse that constantly points out how dead women are good women, and how women’s objectified and victimized position is desirable and accepted. The academy needs to welcome back some anger and some real engagement when discussing images—and the situations and relations that they represent, and which through their constant
reiteration make seem normal. A few filmmakers have already provided the larger audience and the academy with film texts that could serve to initiate debates in the classroom about the unequal relations that structure the fashion industry, and in particular the modeling aspects of it.

Jean Kilbourne’s documentary series *Killing Us Softly* (1979–2010) is hands on when it comes to how fashion images and advertisement convey female subordination as desirable and natural. The more-than-a-decade-old documentary about the industry made by journalist Donal MacIntyre, as part of his series *MacIntyre Undercover* (BBC One, 1999–2003), is highly useful: MacIntyre went undercover posing as a fashion photographer, inveigling his way into the fashion agency Elite Models Management in Milan to uncover how girls as young as 13 and 14 years were not only being sexually abused but also provided with drugs. The documentary had such an impact in outing what was going on that two of the company’s key men—Gerald Marie, president of Elite Europe, and Xavier Moreau, president of Elite Model Look, choose to resign. Gerald Marie, a man then in his 50s, had to resign—or else run the risk getting kicked off the board; in the documentary, he is filmed telling MacIntyre about his plans to seduce the finalists in the Elite Model Look contest (most of whom are 15 or 16 years old) and offering a model money for having sex with him. Model Carré Otis has helped reinforce the image of him as a sexual predator: in her biography *Beauty, Disrupted* (2010) she tells of how he continuously raped her at age 17, when he was her agent and she was starting out as a model for Elite Paris (Otis 2011). Yet, Marie is—again—head of Elite Paris: his misconduct is obviously not a problem for the agency. MacIntyre is not the only journalist that has tried to uncover the seediness of the fashion business; Michael Gross outs the industry’s long history of blatant sexism and sexual exploitation of young women in his 1995 book *Model: The Ugly Business of Beautiful Women*. Through interviews with models, he uncovers the seedy side of the business involving drugs, abuse, and sexual exploitation of adolescent women. Another more contemporary example would be the documentaries *Picture Me* (Ole Schnell and Sarah Ziff, 2009) and *Girl Model* from 2011, in which filmmakers Ashley Sabin and David Redmon uncover how Siberian girls, coming from poor backgrounds and some as young as 13, are headhunted by cynic girl hunters and lured to Japan to make money as models, only to end up isolated and caged, and poorly paid. In this last example, the desire for youth—that is, pre-adolescence—as stipulated by the fashion industry is laid out painstakingly clear.

These examples are excellent entrances into debates within the academia about the fashion industry—and can work as springboards for a more critical and investigative research. Academia can make a difference, and there is no reason to believe that we as academics cannot contribute to a more critical stance toward an industry that exploits underaged girls (and, of course, many of its garment workers all around the world). Fuelled by these visual documents and the testimonies that have recently been given by individuals who have been exploited in one way or another, and by turning to some plain old feminist scholarship (e.g., texts written by Marxist, radical, anti-porn, essentialist-with-a-twist scholars like Catherine MacKinnon, Heidi Hartmann, Carole Sheffield, Sandra Lee Bartky, Luce Irigaray, and
Annie Leclerc), one can start to discuss and analyze the unequal relational structures of the industry together with colleagues and students. These early feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980s should not be criticized for being passé: in fact, their discourse analysis and their social critique of how patriarchy constructs and create imbalance between the genders are highly applicable to the fashion industry and to fashion photography.

**Fashion Photography**

The color photograph depicts three women. Two women are positioned in the front, both of them lying on their back in the sand in somewhat awkward positions, lifeless, as if dumped there. They wear high-heeled shoes, skin colored pantyhose and short skirts. Their upper bodies and faces are covered under new paper magazines. In the back the third woman is positioned in a phone booth, making a call. Her face shows agitation and desperation.

Description of a photo by Guy Bourdin for the French shoe brand Charles Jourdan

The masculine can partly look at itself, speculate about itself, represent itself and describe itself for what it is, whilst the feminine can try to speak to itself through a new language, but cannot describe itself from outside or in formal terms, except by identifying itself with the masculine, thus by losing itself.

*Luce Irigaray,* *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977)

High-end fashion photography—often-ascribed with artistic and *avant-garde* qualities—can get away with almost anything: even with representations that are unquestionably and utterly sexist, misogynist, homophobic, and racist. French photographer Guy Bourdin, to give just one example of a photographer who produces high-end fashion photography, has for long been applauded for the dreamy, cinematographic, *avant-garde*, and artistic qualities of his work, yet his images clearly frolic in and embellish sexual violence against women, not seldom flirting with pedophilia.

The dominant view on representations emanating from the high end of the fashion industry, images and ads produced by famous and recognized photographers, promote postmodern readings that put irony and satire at the center. To bring any actual political implications to light and to emphasize the discrimination that these images advocate and idealize, whether in a popular or in an academic setting, often leads to accusations of a (new) moral panic. (I am fully aware that I may end up being criticized for trying to incite a new moral panic, but this is a risk I am willing to take.)

A contemporary example of images that pass as fashion and as art although they obviously are indisputably pornographic and sexist, are the fashion photographs of American photographer Terry Richardson: his images have been questioned and critiqued by some, like the Swedish Näringslivets Etiska Råd mot Kändiskriminerande Reklam (ERK) (Council
of Business Ethics against Sexist Advertising) or feminist scholar Sheila Jeffreys (2005), yet he has over the years continued to hold a special status as a gaudy and groundbreaking photographer, and his work continues to be labeled artistic and edgy. It was not, however, until spring 2010 that he was seriously critiqued, not so much for his sexist images, but for his misconduct and sexual exploitation of his young models. To these allegations he has reacted by stressing a professional and respectable attitude toward the people in front of the camera. The accusations against him nurtured a debate not only about Richardson, but also about the fashion industry, yet most journalists, academics, fashionistas, and bloggers have prevaricated, not wanting to discredit him totally and not wanting to discredit the industry either. Richardson responds to critics in his blog ‘Terry Richardson’s Diary’:

I just want to take a moment to say I’m really hurt by the recent and false allegations of insensitivity and misconduct. I feel fortunate to work with so many extraordinary people each and every day. I’ve always been considerate and respectful of the people I photograph and I view what I do as a real collaboration between myself and the people in front of the camera. To everyone who has embraced and supported me and my work, I am so grateful. Thank you, it means a lot. (Richardson 2010)

In fact, Richardson’s work is an interesting example of how sexism and misogyny, when carried out in an almost undetectable way, becomes accepted and even desirable: examination of his oeuvre demonstrates that his images have become more sexist, misogynist, and pornographic. In his early shots (see, for example, his early spreads for Harper’s Bazaar US in the late 1990s), frontal nudity was not as rampant as in his later work: and the explicit allusion to, or even representation of, sexual acts (fellatio, cunnilingus, vaginal and anal penetration) is something that has become prevalent only in the last decade. Step by step, his photographs have become more provocative—well, insulting, really—testing the boundaries of what will be accepted or not. Starting as a mere copycat of existing fashion aesthetics in the early 1990s, his images adopted an explicit and pornographic turn when he started to work for the Italian fashion brand Sisley. Sisley allowed him to create images that were clearly over the top, and in doing so he extended his own boundaries—a fact he acknowledges:

Sisley was a great job for a long time because they were really just letting me be me, doing whatever the hell I wanted to do. It was all about sex pictures. I’ve always been able to walk that fine line, to balance myself, to do fashion and also do my naughty pictures. Why do I get away with it? I’m a genius. With a capital J. (Richardson and Hanson 2008)

Explicitly showing off what can only be understood as a sex addiction, his photographs of the last decade—together with the testimonies of a few models on how they have been treated on the set (see, e.g., Sauers 2010)—have suddenly left a sour taste in the reader’s mouth. Whereas phallocentrism (i.e., the emphasis on a male point-of-view)—together with phallogocentrism has always been a strong guideline for mainstream cinema as well
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as for fashion photography, in Richardson's photos this centrism becomes all too apparent and literal. In the 2000s he has taken his 'pornomania' even further, and seems to have had the back-up needed from people in the business (from fashion magazine editors and designers—to models, even), and it all now seems to center around his dick. And the dick, his dick, has now become a stand-in for his camera, whereas the camera earlier probably was a stand-in for his dick (Richardson and Hanson 2008).

The images he has produced over the years, in fact hold very few artistic qualities: they are images for fashion brands—Sisley and more upscale brands such as Gucci and Miu Miu—and most of them portray young women often in awkward situations, referencing bestiality and rape. Their clothes are ripped and show a lot of skin with an emphasis on thighs, breasts, and crotch as in many of his shots for Sisley and his shots for Tom Ford (nude women next to dressed men). In more recent photographs, those referred to as 'Terry's snapshots', the connection to a specific brand is missing—and the models appear in the nude, often with Richardson placing himself next to them, as if saying: 'Look, I made them undress.' Yet, his photos are read as fashion, due to his legacy as a well-known fashion photographer and due to the fact that the models either are fashion models or look like fashion models. Some of the infamous snapshots of the day, published in magazines such as Purple Magazine and/or on his own website, are pictures of fashion models, hence the link to fashion is still clear. However he also has snapshots depicting himself engaging in oral, vaginal (and anal?) sex with young women—often 'decapitated' with their faces out of frame, or even covered in black bags (see Richardson and Hanson 2008; Navo 2010). The focus in these photographs is penetration of a (female) body, hence these shots are nothing more than simple pornography. As a sex-fixated photographer, and one who assumedly has said, early on in his career: 'It's not who you know, it's who you blow' , he here excludes the fashion element, and the model is positioned as just another fuck-able female body (Onstad 2011). Some pictures even exclude the model in toto: focusing on himself—that, is, his dick. Richardson demonstrates his obsession with his own penis (phallocentrism and narcissism in one) and his power as an established photographer by turning his shooting sequences into porn shoots, and getting away with it. In one photo that has been published on the Internet, Richardson sits at his desk, talking on the phone, his fly open, and a woman on her knees between his legs (apparently his 'assistant') giving him fellatio from in under his desk (see Yotka 2010). One shot, one image, one representation. One might wonder what led up to this situation—and more importantly, how did it end? The sexual exploitation is inscribed in this picture: the picture is all about the exploitation. And it is confirmed in the many shots where a grinning Richardson looks directly at the viewer giving them a thumbs up implying 'see I did it again'. Without any testimonies as to what actually happened before and after the click, it is difficult to pinpoint the exploitation—all we have is a still. It is—still—an image.

And so, when model Jamie Peck chose to speak up in 2010, she was applauded by many as she helped start a debate about not only Richardson's exploitation of young women, but also, about the fashion industry. In Peck's testimony, she spoke openly about what happened in his studio when she, aged 19, was doing a shoot for Purple Magazine. She recalled:
I told him I had my period so I wanted to keep my underwear on, and he asked me to take my tampon out for him to play with. ‘I love tampons!’ he said, in that psychotically upbeat way that temporarily convinces so many girls that what’s fun for Uncle Terry is fun for them. (I can just imagine him chirping, ‘Why don’t you wear these fairy wings while I fuck you in the ass? Wouldn’t that be like, so fun?’ to some attenuated girl fresh off the boat from Eastern Europe. Either the man’s totally delusional, or he gets off on the fact that many of these things are not, in fact, very much fun for the girls.) I politely declined his offer to make tea out of my bloody cunt plug. It was then that he decided to just get naked. Before I could say ‘whoa, whoa, whoa!’ dude was wearing only his tattoos and waggling the biggest dick I’d ever seen dangerously close to my unclothed person (granted, I hadn’t seen very many yet). ‘Why don’t you take some pictures of me?’ he asked. Um, sure. I’m not sure how he maneuvered me over to the couch, but at some point he strongly suggested I touch his terrifying penis. This is where I zoom out on the situation. I can remember doing this stuff, but even at the time, it was sort of like watching someone else do it, someone who couldn’t possibly be me because I would never touch a creepy photographer’s penis. The only explanation I can come up with is that he was so darn friendly and happy about it all, and his assistants were so stoked on it as well, that I didn’t want to be the killjoy in the room. My new fake friends would’ve been bummed if I’d said no. I must have said something about finals, because he told me, ‘if you make me come, you get an A.’ So I did! Pretty fast, I might add. All over my left hand. His assistant handed me a towel. (Peck 2010)

This long quote illustrates how sexual coercion often works: it is not until after it has happened that the coerced realizes what was done to her/him, often with feelings of disgust and anguish following. In a work situation—in this specific case, a model turning up for a shoot, obviously admiring the photographer who might be able to help her in her career—in which nudity is expected, and in which the outcome is the production of sexy pictures, there is a fine line between the representation and real acts leading up to the representation. We also need to take into account that the pressure on a young model to be ‘up for it’ (i.e., not to be a prude or a child) is at stake here. Peck describes how she ‘didn’t want to be the killjoy in the room’ and how she thought her ‘new fake friends would’ve been bummed’ if she had said no.

A few days before Peck had posted her story on the internet site The Gloss, famous model Rie Rasmussen had publically accused Richardson of sexually harassing young girls. Rasmussen, of course, had not that much to lose from speaking up: she was in her early 30s, well-respected as a model, actress, and film director. For younger women just starting their modeling career, much more is at stake: Richardson has had immense power within the industry, and he has had long-standing relationships with influential magazines like Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar, and commercial clients like the aforementioned Gucci and Sisley. They have all supported him—despite knowing of his sexual exploitation of young models. And so, Terry Richardson continues to get jobs with the most famous. The same unwillingness to act and to put a stop to this kind of exploitation of young girls is to be found in the relation
to the photos produced for the brand American Apparel. There were a few critical voices regarding the brand’s use of young girls posing in the nude for free a couple of years ago, and the strategy of the company has been to take this exploitation even further (see Chernikoff 2011)—which seems to have worked to their benefit since the critique has silenced.

The fashion industry, of course, has for a long time been a predatory and exploitive one, just like other entertainment industries (the film industry, the music industry, television, and pornography). It has been fueled by alcohol, drugs, money, and sex. Further, it is an industry which relies on sexual imagery and allure, no doubt. Sex—or the erotic—has been used to sell fashion, just like sex has been used to sell film and music. Within these industries, the photographed female body operates as an object of exchange—she is a commodity, she has exchange value as well as use value (Irigaray 1977). This does not mean that we have to accept this as the status quo: female commodification and subordination through sexual exploitation and outspread misogyny should not be accepted, not if we want to live in an equal society, not if we want life to be livable, not only bearable, for everyone (Butler 2004).

Conclusion

Fashion photography, just like the cinematic institution, is about woman, but it is not for her. This may seem contradictory since most fashion photography is targeted toward women as consumers and since women do constitute the majority of consumers of both fashion magazines and women’s fashion. Yet, it is not for women: it is part of, as well as an expression of, a phallocentric and patriarchal culture in which male phallo(go)centrism is the dominant, a culture in which the idea of an unequal sexual difference as necessary and desirable is law. And phallo(go)centrism, without a doubt, goes hand in hand with capitalism, mass culture, and mass consumption. Within this culture, everything that can ensure pleasure and power to the male gaze is for sale. Within both fashion and film industry, young women’s bodies are for sale: they have, as mentioned above, both an exchange value and a use value—as long as they are desirable to this gaze, that is (Irigaray 1977).

Without explicitly connecting capitalism with phallogocentrism critical theory would already in the 1930s (e.g., Benjamin 1936; Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 1972; and Bloch, [1936–47] 1986), theorize culture industries—of which cinema was one—in terms of representations of capitalist society and/or as escapist entertainment (with its offering of dreams as a double movement between capitalist dominance and a possibility of a political potential). In the late 1960s and the early 70s, much due to feminist theory, the patriarchal dominance and its phallo(go)centrism in culture and society came under the magnifying glass. In critical film theory, psychoanalytical, semiotic, Marxist, and feminist theories helped broaden the horizon: a certain focus on the visual pleasures that cinema offered its spectator was cultivated, and these pleasures were understood to be predominantly male.
Once the female spectator convincingly was ‘discovered’ (Mulvey 1975), she was understood as being negated in terms of active subjecthood since cinema—as a technical and narrative apparatus—offered only male positions within, and in relation to, the screen and the narrative. Hence, an active female spectator positioning herself as subject could only be read in terms of transvestism (Mulvey 1975; Doane 1982). Relying closely on a feminist and psychoanalytical framework, theorists during the 1970s and 1980s would ascribe to mainstream cinema voyeurism as guiding principle and a narrative structure built on sadism (Mulvey 1975; de Lauretis 1984)—with the male represented as sadist in his physical conquest of the female in order to be included in the homosocial sphere (a.k.a. ‘the Symbolic order’ and the Law of the father). The female was still represented as masochist in her domestication, imprisonment, or—in the worst scenario—in her own rape, mutilation, or murder (Williams [1984] 1996). Because of the introduction of queer theory in the early 1990s, much has moved forward within critical (feminist) film theory, opening up for a more flexible reading of film, its representations, and its (female) spectator. Mulvey, Williams and others would re-consider and revise their early (psychoanalytically) influenced take on cinema—and offer re-readings of their own seminal texts—in order to open up for a more possible feminine subject position both within the film text and within the audience (Mulvey 1975; Williams 2001). However, the dominant representation of women as sexual victims, of dead and violated women as good women, has remained. And very similar sexist and misogynist representations have only increased in number in high-end fashion photography.

Film and fashion, as two highly popular and commercial representations and narratives, speak of unequal sexual difference as desirable, even when trying to ‘upset’ this difference via a certain queering of gender. Fashion and film are, to speak with Teresa de Lauretis, ‘gender technologies’ (de Lauretis 1987). Further, as gender technologies they both rely on representing sexuality, gender, and death—and this by nurturing an idea of sexual difference within which women are positioned as sexual victims in an all phallocentric universe. Not only do these kinds of images present women as sexual Image, they also serve to feed what American feminist Carol Sheffield has called ‘sexual terrorism’, a terrorism that women live with and come to accept from a young age since it is part of a profound (and, in most societies, accepted) social control of women (Sheffield 1989). In black and white, or in color, the representations of sexual terrorism as ‘natural’ are there for us to consume: presented in glossy magazines, on billboards, presented with an immaculate aesthetics, and surrounded by goods we desire, and always in abundance.

Is it the abundance, the aesthetics, and the naturalization—if not normalization—that comes with it that help fashion and its high-end photography escape any thorough feminist critique within academia? Whereas sexist, racist, homophobic, and misogynist representations in both mainstream and artistic film have for long been the targets for serious critique, the fashion industry seems to be holding an impenetrable position. Sexism and misogyny, together with homophobia and racism, are inscribed in the images that fashion produces, but difficult to get at since fashion, and the fashionable, get in their way.
Why is it that feminists have had so little to say about fashion photography (and the fashion industry) and its exploitive and sexist core? And why do fashion images slip through into the acceptable, the tolerable—into what is expected? This has hardly to do with feminists traditionally not being interested in fashion. Rather, it might have to do with that fact that it is hard to critique what one possibly also enjoys. Yet, contradictory sentiments and conflicting understandings of a phenomenon have not hindered feminist critique before, rather the opposite. The contradiction—the love/hate relationship and the feeling of being both on the inside and the outside—is what feminist thought since its second wave has thrived on (e.g., Mulvey 1975; de Lauretis 1984; Flitterman-Lewis 1996).

And so, it is important to bring critical thinking and some feminist anger (back) into the classroom as well as into research and for academics to address contemporary sexist fashion photography and the unequal gendered structures on which fashion relies. Academics can make a difference: our work—our teaching, our research, our contributions to the public debate—is not without value, rather the opposite, and maybe this work can contribute to a more equal situation within the industry, as well as a change within fashion photography and the sexist images it produces.

Representation and fiction have a meaning, and they portray events that have been staged, yet also events that have taken place. Further, they have power in the way that they shape people's understanding of others and themselves, and when a certain image gets shown and published in the media over and over again, one comes to believe in that image. I will give Richard Dyer, whose work on representation still has an enormous importance, the last word since he skillfully manages to pinpoint what really is at stake here:

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure it citizens. (Dyer 1993: 1)

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Notes

1 Two classic examples of sadism and voyeuristic pleasure carried out toward actresses on screen and on the film set are Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) and Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971). In *The Birds*, Tippi Hedren, playing the active and energetic lead, had a mental breakdown after days of filming the scene in which she was enclosed in a small space and attacked by birds. The breakdown was triggered when her eyelid was cut by a bird's beak—after days of having had birds thrown at her by men wearing protective masks and gloves. Susan George, in *Straw Dogs*, was practically forced to partake in an explicit rape scene, a scene which had not been in the script she had agreed—and signed—to film (see Williams 1995; Spoto 1999; Kermode 2003; Simkin 2011).

2 Susan George was, as mentioned above, forced to shoot a rape scene against her will (see, e.g., Williams 1995; Simkin 2011). In an interview, Debbie Reynolds recalls how she almost lost her life while filming *How the West Was Won* (1961) as she was forced to do a drowning scene against her will. Director Hathaway argued that it was crucial that she do the scene herself, although her role could have been carried out by a stuntwoman or even a dummy, and she finally gave in. In the finished film it is impossible to see whether it really is Reynolds or someone else being violently drowned in a heavy-flowing stream.

3 Between 1999 and 2003, Sisley was condemned no less than five times by ERK for its sexist and discriminating ads in Sweden. See Göthlund (2003).

4 'Phallogocentrism' (or, originally and more narrowly, 'logocentrism') is a neologism coined by Jacques Derrida that refers to the perceived tendency in Western thought to locate the center of any text or discourse within the *logos* (a Greek word meaning word, reason, or spirit) and the *phallus* (a representation of the male genitalia).

5 Rasmussen said: 'He takes girls who are young, manipulates them to take their clothes off and takes pictures of them they will be ashamed of. They are too afraid to say no because their agency booked them on the job and are too young to stand up for themselves.' See Anon, 'Model Snaps at Fashion Fotog', *New York Post*, 11 March, [http://www.nypost.com/p/pagesix/model_snaps_at_fashion_fotog_P489aSOevwAo35ikoKsRKI#ixzz0zCSjpfPr](http://www.nypost.com/p/pagesix/model_snaps_at_fashion_fotog_P489aSOevwAo35ikoKsRKI#ixzz0zCSjpfPr).