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# Death Becomes *Her*:

the death aesthetic in/as fashion advertising

Andrew William Elvish

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art History

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## Abstract

### **Death Becomes *Her*: the death aesthetic in/as fashion advertising**

Andrew William Elvish

What is it in “fashion” that naturalizes the image of the dying, dead or violated female body? Why do images that equate woman, fashion, aesthetics and death carry such a cachet in the fashion magazine? What is the communication that obtains when one pairs aesthetics and death? Can the aestheticization of death in the fashion magazine be seen as a site of rupture in the sign system of “the fashionable”; or simply a further entrenchment of the idea of woman as nothing more than body - *her* perfection, inevitably, *her* death?

*Death Becomes Her* is a thesis about fashion and the imagination. Fashion is, at once, a site of powerful hegemonic discourses about how we should understand and present our bodies, while at the same time being a terrain of debate, contestation, and reformulation in a larger cultural dialogue. This thesis, through the creation of an eclectic methodology which draws on the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, Elizabeth Grosz and Elisabeth Bronfen, will engage the often slippery and capricious image-scape of the fashion advertisement in a dialogue. This dialogue seeks neither closure nor answers to the questions posed, but, rather, seeks to weave together a series of disparate texts into a *textile* that will present to you, the reader, a cloth woven of conflicted dreams. Fashion, we will see, is a Janus-faced super-model whose death is dreamt as a dream of perfection.

For my parents:

Robert James Elvish  
and  
Odene Elizabeth Elvish

there are no two people in the world  
whom I admire more.  
With intelligence, compassion, and love  
you taught me how to live in the world.



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Let's face it: we're all in this together, oh gentle reader;  
and no one - and that includes you and me, both -  
gets out of here, alive.

-Sue Golding, "Pariah Bodies"

# Introduction...

In mass culture the manifest body, however, is the body of woman, which becomes the very antithesis of individuality celebrated in high culture's body of the artist. The feminine body in mass culture is the symbol of saturation by the commodity, the field of play for money, power, capital and sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Bronfen asks, in her book *Over Her Dead Body: Death Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1993): "How can a verbal or visual artistic representation be both aesthetically pleasing and morbid, as the conjunction of beautiful woman and death seems to imply?"<sup>2</sup> Death, and the ways in which Western culture approaches the event of death, speak volumes about our own desires, fears and imaginings. Death is always *other*<sup>3</sup> - for I cannot write about my death, unless I project myself as an other, locate the terminal point away from my corpse. As such, death is the site of ultimate alterity, the place where self and other are most trenchantly enforced.

Fashion and the glittering world surrounding the fashion industry may seem to be an odd locale for a discussion of death. But fashion has, especially since the inception of photography, been very much enamoured of death. Early fashion photography, for practical reasons, carried with it the stillness of

<sup>1</sup>Griselda Pollock, "Painting, Feminism, History," Michele Barret and Anne Phillips eds., *Destabilizing Theory*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Bronfen *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. x.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Burke remarks, "...no one can write of death from an immediate experience of it, the imagining of death necessarily involves images not directly belonging to it...[it lies] beyond the realm of such images that the living body knows." "Thanatopsis for Critics: a brief Thesaurus for Deaths and Dyings," in *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 369.

death -- a technical by-product of the slow exposure times of film. *Vogue's* chief photographer, George Hoyningnen-Huene (1900-1968)<sup>4</sup> complained that he "...was unable to capture real life, with the models seeming to freeze in front of the lens."<sup>5</sup> Even as technology advanced the affect of death remained fixed in the fashion photograph, an often unspoken undercurrent in the Western aesthetic of fashion photography.

A recent article in the Canadian art magazine, *Border Crossings*, entitled "The Fashionable Body: Essaying the Aesthetics of the Fashion Photograph," attests to the often tacit understanding that the fashion model is perfected, in death, through photography.<sup>6</sup> Its author, Robert Enright, consistently uses words associated with death, violence or consumption throughout his "essay"; for example, "...she not only doesn't shield herself from viewers, but she invites their omnivorous gaze," or, "...she is an Ophelia surrogate drifting in the direction of her imminent death." Rather simplistically, Enright exults in the "new" sexual popularity of strip clubs and phone sex as means of protecting a "rapaciously voyeuristic culture" from the spread of AIDS. Apparently, his assumption is that because sex (read: physical and implicitly heterosexual) is now dangerous due to AIDS, we should feel free to uncritically consume the

<sup>4</sup>For more information on the life and work of George Hoyningnen-Huene see: W. A. Ewing, *The Photographic Art of Hoyningnen-Huene*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.

<sup>5</sup>K. de Perthuis, "Drop Dead Chic," *Open City* to be found at: <http://sysx.apana.org.au/realtime/rt15/dropdead.html>.

<sup>6</sup>R. Enright, "The Fashionable Body: Essaying the Aesthetics of the Fashion Photograph," *Border Crossings*, vol. 14 no. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 46-49.

flesh of women through our eyes (hardly ground-breaking news). His article exults in phrases such as this quote taken from Anatole France: "There is no finer, richer, more beautiful fabric than the skin of a beautiful woman." (Enright, 1995, pp. 48) I am expected, as the reader to see *his* view that fashion, now more than ever before, is a "skin trade"; more precisely, a trade in the skins of women -- and isn't this seductive? States Enright, "The fact that you can't tell the difference between the showgirls and the models is one measure of how far we've come in accepting the body." (Enright, 1995, pp. 48)

This article, placed in *Border Crossing's* issue on "The Body", is almost amusing in the fact that the author styles himself "avant-garde". I say almost amusing, because the tropes to which Enright refers (skin, Ophelia, prostitution) are such unsettling staples of the representational economy of the "female". Of course, Enright's article is neither unique nor shocking in its refusal to critically engage concepts of death and femininity in the fashion photograph -- for to name this trope ruins the dream of perfection that is constantly supported by a scaffolding of female mortality. Fashion is structurally dependant on death, "for whether it is consciously recognised or not, there is something inherently morbid in fashion's constant change and renewal...fashion's relentless 'death-wish'; in order to live, fashion - with its restless desire for the new - must die, and so always carries the imprint of death and eternal life."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>K. de Perthuis, <http://sysx.apana.org.au/realtime/rt15/dropdead.html>.



This "death-wish" is what forms the core of this thesis. What is it in "fashion" that naturalizes the image of the dying, dead or violated female body? Why do images that equate woman, fashion, aesthetics and death carry such a cachet in the fashion magazine? What is the communication that obtains when one pairs aesthetics and death? Can the aestheticization of death in the fashion magazine be seen as a site of rupture in the sign system of "the fashionable"; or simply as a further entrenchment of the idea of woman as nothing more than body - *her* perfection, inevitably, *her* death?<sup>8</sup>

It is also this "death-wish" which has, in many ways, prevented a thesis like this from having been written sooner. To explain, fashion, with its constant cycle of "in with the new and out with the old", has lulled many researchers into the belief that it is too ephemeral, too prone to drastic change, to be studied in any way other than 'epi-phenomenally' or 'historically'. Studying the surface of the phenomena "fashion" is hardly new: costume history (Cunnington 1937 and 1952, Davenport 1972, Bell 1976, Ebin 1979, Gains and Herzog 1990), anthropologic studies of dressing (Flugel 1930, Simmel 1957, König 1973, Hollander 1978, Kaiser 1985, Roach and Eicher 1985, Davis 1992, Rubenstein 1995) and, of course, some more risque work on such fashionable fetishes as the corset and high-heels (Yool 1946, Gosselin and Wilson 1980, Steele 1985 and 1991) are reasonably common occurrences in academic

<sup>8</sup>Bronfen states, "On the other hand the anatomist has not yet begun his dissection, in the process of which he will cut into and destroy the lines of her perfectly shaped body...the draping of the shroud underscores the aestheticization [of the corpse] by suggesting the materialization of a statue. *The feminine body appears as perfect, immaculate aesthetic form because it is a dead body, solidified into an object of art.*" (emphasis added) Elisabeth Bronfen, 1991, pp. 5.

research. As familiar as these studies are, there are few that deal with fashion as a 'phenomenon' (describable event, remarkable moment) that engages not only our desires to clothe ourselves, but also the psychic role played by the fashion industry in the Western imagination. Notable among writers who have attempted to come to terms with the manifold impact of fashion on the 'cultural imagination' are Roland Barthes (*System de la Mode*, 1967), Leslie Rabine ("A Woman's Two Bodies," 1994), Kaja Silverman ("Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," 1994), Rhonda Leiberman ("Shopping Disorders," 1993) and Juliet Ash (*Components of Dress*, 1987, and *Chic Thrills* 1992).

*Death Becomes Her* is a thesis about fashion and the imagination. Structurally, this thesis will draw the discourse of fashion into a number of realms hitherto unexplored in 'fashion theory'. Specifically, I will consider the role played by the fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar* in constructing concepts of femininity through the trope of death. The choice to study *Harper's Bazaar's* 1995 season was done with a very specific motivation. Since September 1993, when *Harper's Bazaar* underwent a complete aesthetic overhaul, not to mention a change of editors, *Bazaar* has focused itself on an extremely artistically conceived notion of fashion. Their "re-vamped" September 1993 issue ran the single cover head-line - "Enter the Era of Elegance" - which could, just as aptly, have been "Enter the Era of the Postmodern." The new *Harper's Bazaar* redefined what the fashion magazine was going to look like at the end of the Twentieth century. Fashion, in the era of elegance is not solely about how one is dressing themselves, but about an identity politics of fashion - fashion as *lifestyle*. Liz Tilberis, *Bazaar's* new editor-in-chief, states;

With this issue, *Harper's Bazaar* enters a new era. In putting the magazine together, the idea of modern elegance has been our central inspiration. Elegance -- of mind as much as of appearance -- implies intelligence, certainty of taste, a *balanced and centered identity*.<sup>9</sup>

The 'Era of Elegance' is also an era of exploration. Since 1993, *Harper's Bazaar* has been running more and more spreads which push the limits of fashion photography. In this pushing of boundaries, *Bazaar* has been witness to a number of fashion spreads and advertisements that take up dissenting voices toward the very structure of the magazine in which they appear. Thus, I approach this newly created "fashionable" forum, as a local for a theoretical reading of the way fashion is being constructed at the fin-de-siecle.

Writing about fashion magazines in this manner is often a difficult undertaking, primarily because critical studies that undertake to see the fashion magazine as a site of cultural and psychical significance are few. Thus, in the hopes of creating a "model" for further academic inquiry, I have divided this thesis into two parts -- methods and analyses. The first division delimits a battery of (at times) provisional and leaky methods, which are implemented in the subsequent section wherein a series of fashion advertisements is analysed.

Part One, or the methodological cutting-table, will prepare a pattern upon which I will eventually fashion an analysis. Here I will discuss the founding assumptions from which I work, my primary concern being to convey the importance of understanding the role of communication in a dialogic framework. For, as we will come to see, it is the struggle over languages -- authoritarian, complicit, and contestational -- that configures our understanding

<sup>9</sup>L. Tilberis, "Editors Note," *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1993, pp. 33. Emphasis added.

and comprehension of the image in "fashion". To this end, I will draw out some of the more salient and important features of a Bakhtinian approach to communication, an approach known as *dialogics*. Under the rubric of dialogism, it will be the roles played by ideology (in the construction of language) and the subject (in her/his dialogue with said language) that are of interest to my study. From Bakhtin I will move into a discussion of the politics underlying my analyses -- a politics which stems from a theoretically informed feminism. Here I will concentrate on the writings of Elizabeth Grosz and her research on the [sexualized and embodied] Western episteme. Grosz' 'politics of thought' is of the utmost importance when studying images. Deeply embedded power structures dictate both the psychic and visual roles played by the women in fashion photography; power structures which rely, significantly, on a fundamental binary distinction between man and woman -- a distinction which consistently aligns the female with the bodily, the unpredictable and the unstable. The last theoretical text to be discussed is that of Elisabeth Bronfen, whose work on the cultural equation of femininity and death builds upon the work of Grosz. I will focus primarily on Bronfen's 1992 book, *Over Her Dead Body*, as a means of situating both Bakhtin's dialogism and Grosz's politics of thought in an analytic framework which will resonate throughout my own analyses.

Part Two, or the sewing table, will draw together the patterns laid out in Part One, and combine them into a critical discourse around the understanding of *her* body in fashion advertising. This discussion will locate itself in three distinct areas: the first will consider concepts of narrative structure, and how

this structure, within the fashion magazine, serves to stabilize representations of death. This will be demonstrated through a discussion of Neiman Marcus' advertising spread "Some Day I'll be a Famous Fashion Model and Wear Beautiful Clothes,"<sup>10</sup> a critical advertisement parodying the stasis of the fashion magazine. The second area of discussion will engage the concepts of utopia and heterotopia through which the discourse of (unattainable) perfection, which is so prevalent in the fashion magazine, will be filtered. Here I will consider the relocation of the "living" (heterotopic) body into the "dead" (utopic) image-world of the fashionable through a discussion of Annie Leibowitz's photo shoot for Neiman Marcus' "Art of Fashion" special advertising section.<sup>11</sup> This move depends on the viewer turning her/his self into a living spectacle, becoming deadened objects of contemplation for ourselves. The third and final area of investigation will focus on an extremely disturbing series of photos by Helmut Newton for Anna Molinari's line of clothes called *Blumarine*.<sup>12</sup> This advertisement will be considered in the light of recent critical analyses of prostitution as both rupture and fantasy within the imagination of Western capitalism. I will also critically examine the role of pop-cultural explorations into the theme of excessive violence.

I approach this last topic with the knowledge that these photos are

<sup>10</sup> "Some Day I'll Be a Famous Fashion Model and Wear Beautiful Clothes," photographed by Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995, 15 pp., 34 separate photos.

<sup>11</sup> "The Art of Fashion" photographed by Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995, 14 pp., 30 separate images.

<sup>12</sup> Advertisement for Anna Molinari *Blumarine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995, photographed by Helmut Newton, 2 pp., 4 separate images.

difficult texts which are not easily discussed apart from the very real violence which they reflect.<sup>13</sup> However, I believe that these images problematize our own conceptions and expectations of fashionable representation within the fashion magazine; opening an avenue within which we may question the ideologically saturated practice of imagining the fashionable female body.

I do not propose a "reading against the grain", rather, I hope to read "symptomatically" in the manner outlined in Pierre Macherey's 1966 text, *A Theory of Literary Production*. To read symptomatically means to read a text according to its absences and aporias ("...what the text does not say."<sup>14</sup>). As Macherey states, "A work is established against an ideology as it is from an ideology. Implicitly, the work contributes to an exposure of ideology, or at least as definition of it."<sup>15</sup> The symptomatic reading is likened to the reflective surface of a mirror - which never truly reflects but distorts and renders partially the subject in front of it. "The selection itself is not fortuitous, it is symptomatic; it can tell us about the nature of the mirror..."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>According to Statistics Canada's *Violence Against Women Survey* for 1993, "One in two Canadian women (51%) experiences at least one incident of male violence after the age of 16." Other statistics include, "Twenty per cent of the women who experience wife assault are assaulted during pregnancy. Over 64% of women who experience violence are assaulted by men who are known to them. The attackers are most often spouses, boyfriends, dates and neighbours. One in three women in violent relationships fears for her life due to the severity of the violence." Further information can be found at: <http://www.weq.gov.bc.ca:80/progandserv/stv/statistics.html>  
For more information on the global phenomenon of violence against women see: M. Holloway, "A Global View," in *Scientific America*, August 1994, pp. 76-83.

<sup>14</sup>L. Pearce, *Woman Image Text*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991, pp. 9.

<sup>15</sup>P. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. G. Wall, London: Routledge, 1978, pp. 133.

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 120.

The images that will be considered in this thesis will be accessed through this symptomatic reading strategy. It will be employed both as a means to draw these images into a discourse *other* than the fashionable one in which they are presently situated and to highlight the internal contradictions posed by these photos within the pages of the fashion magazine. Thus I posit a dual power struggle: the first between the reader and the text, and the second between text and context or the "refusal" of one to fit the other. These two struggles are not mutually exclusive, indeed they depend on one another to bring the text's immanent ideology to the foreground. It is the selected image's refusal to fit the text into which they are situated that compels me, the reader, to draw them out into a space of debate. Put most clearly by Lynne Pearce, "[Symptomatic reading]...offers the feminist reader the means of 'breaking apart' resistant texts; of shattering the ideological coherence of their surfaces to reveal *not* a 'hidden centre', but a fluid and contradictory repository of discourses."<sup>17</sup>

In the end, one will see that the fashion magazine represents an integral site of cultural imagining: it is, at once, a site of powerful monologic discourses about how we should understand and present our bodies, while also being a terrain of debate, contestation, and reformulation in a larger cultural dialogue. By examining the fashion magazine in a localized and specific manner, it becomes clear that in an age of extreme body consciousness and bodily 'fragmentation' (see: Kroker 1987, Jameson 1991, Taylor and Saarinen 1994), the presentation of images of the body (in pain, in ecstasy) is less about the

<sup>17</sup>L. Pearce, 1991, pp. 10-11.

fashion of clothes and more about the fashioning of a lifestyle: that dreamed of point where fashion will bridge the lacunae between our imperfect lives and our future-perfect [styled] selves.

## **Views:**

This subsection of the introduction is meant to explore the admittedly difficult formulation of a "viewer" when discussing a visual text such as a fashion magazine. Although I believe that words (texts) are polyphonic, I also believe, perhaps more realistically, that certain texts say certain things to certain people. More specifically, texts have preferred listeners who will benefit "more fully" from the text's content. Positioning a *viewer*, then, is a complicated task - for I cannot ever know you, nor what texts you may perceive as exclusive, inclusive or indifferent. I can only conjecture as to what you may or may not find meaningful; as futile a task as Don Juan's tilting at wind mills. Therefore, being no Don Juan, I will refuse to conjecture, but will instead position myself as the *ideal* viewer. I propose not to side-step the extremely troublesome question of the viewer, but rather to engage in a discussion of what I mean when I say "I the viewer".

As we will see, this paper is based on the assumption that all communication is dialogic. But, it is a common misconception that 'dialogue' is synonymous with unlimited and unbiased meaning. Josephine Donovan remarks on this misconception in her article "Style and Power" (1991): "The current popularity of Mikhail Bakhtin's work among Western critics lies mainly



in the fact that several of his key concepts -- in particular that of the dialogue -- seem to reinforce the pluralist ideal of liberal humanism."<sup>18</sup> One cannot understate the point that dialogue is not equal, nor is it free or unencumbered: dialogue continually inscribes and describes a complex hierarchy of relations between addressor and addressee. The viewer, then, is in constant negotiation of both her/his reception of the text and the text's positioning of her/him as reader/receiver.<sup>19</sup>

By positioning myself as reader/viewer of/and commentator on the fashion magazine, specifically *Harper's Bazaar*, I am, in turn, positioned by the magazine. Admittedly, I fall outside of the target audience of *Harper's Bazaar* as a male,<sup>20</sup> but as both a critic of culture and a committed fan of fashion I am able to insert myself with relative ease into the discourse of fashion. Nonetheless, as a feminist I often find that I am at combat with myself - asking myself why I take pleasure in images which are, at times, so blatantly misogynist? Texts, such as the fashion magazine, may posit their "ideal" viewer - the person to whom the product will be sold - but cannot maintain an

<sup>18</sup>J. Donovan, "Style and Power," *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 85.

<sup>19</sup>Lynne Pearce states, "While I, the reader, exist in dialogic relationship with the text (any text), I am nevertheless *positioned by it*...as an ally or as a protagonist." From "'I' the Reader: Text, Context and the balance of Power," *Feminist Subjects, Multi-Media Cultural Methodologies*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, pp. 169.

<sup>20</sup>According to a reader poll, The "average" *Harper's Bazaar* reader is a 35 year old professional who takes vitamins, watches her diet and wears jeans on the weekend. This is contrasted to *Vogue's* reader, described as the "advertiser's dream," a "racy" single woman in her mid-thirties with kids from a previous marriage, who reads the ads as carefully as the features. From, V. Vienne, "Advertisers and Magazine Dollars", *Mother Jones*, vol. 19, no. 5 (September 1994), pp. 64.

exclusive grip on this one (standardized) point of view. Through a resistant reading practice which both engages and questions the text, this thesis will approach images as 'contested ground', which is to say that I will approach the photograph both as a site of contestational reading practices and a site of ideological recuperation. In the end, what this reading will achieve is a deeper understanding of the many conflicted roles the consumer must play in a market-place made up more and more by images. As we are bombarded daily by images of happiness, plenitude and beauty we must constantly re-negotiate our positions toward these visual texts: states Lynne Pearce, "...[a text] becomes the site of a struggle for *reader-privilege*. Readers of different classes, races and sexual orientations may turn hungrily from page to page for a sign of their own preferment."<sup>21</sup>

This thesis will not try to find a perfect text. It will find *texts*, however, that *matter* and produce a desire in me to engage with the dominant/privileged ideology of the text in an attempt to draw it into my own personal orbit of experience: the desire of an enthusiast or a fan. Lawrence Grossberg discusses these desires in his article, "The Affective Sensibility of Fandom"(1992). Grossberg asks the question "What makes popular culture popular?" and in his discussion touches upon a number of points germane to my study of the fashion magazine. Most importantly, Grossberg discusses the concept of affect and investment within the cultural apparatus. "Mattering maps" are grids upon which we -- as consumers of texts, pleasures, objects, and sensations -- chart

<sup>21</sup>L. Pearce, 1995, p. 168.

our investments of time, emotion, feeling, etc.. These maps create and inform our *affective* selves. Although the concept of 'affect' is extremely slippery and often without clear definition, one can be safe in saying that it is affect which gives "'colour', 'tone' or 'texture' to our experiences."<sup>22</sup> Grossberg points out that these maps are less like the regimented system of longitude and latitude found on geographic maps, and more like an investment portfolio. Within this portfolio, there are a number of different and changing investments of varying intensity and worth. To quote Grossberg at length:

There are not only different places marked out (practices, pleasures, meanings, fantasies, desires, relations and so on) but different purposes which these investments, and different moods in which they can operate. Mattering maps define different forms, quantities and places of energy. They tell us how to use and generate energy, how to navigate our way through various moods, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories. (Grossberg, 1992, pp. 57-58)

The way we view (consume) objects, images, and texts is bound-up with this cartography of affect; the ways in which we learn to talk about (criticize) these same objects is, in effect, through our ability to navigate our own terrains.

When I refer to the viewer in this thesis, I refer to myself, to my own reasons for viewing, to my own *matters*. I would never presume to be *the* ideal viewer (but I am the ideal viewer for myself...) as the ideal would never produce anything more than a simple mirroring - flat, without affect or depth. Thus, I must ask you to remember that this thesis is predicated on the concept of a dialogue with you, the reader. We are not in an open field, rather, we are in a

<sup>22</sup>L. Grossberg, "The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," *The Adoring Audience*, L. Lewis (ed.), London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 57.

room which we have both entered from different doors (different paths). The ensuing dialogue will not enter the room neutrally, but will be either taken up or ignored by you, my reader.

To close this section let me sum-up by saying that when “the viewer” enters the picture she/he will always do so with biases. As you read on, I am certain that the dialogue I engage will at times include you and at other times exclude you. It must be kept in mind, however, that the text will always be assumed by and through you: as such, it is your positioning and *repositioning* that will determine the meaning-in-dialogue of this text. I would like to close this section with a quote from Lynne Pearce: “While hers may be a *reactive* position..., she has a degree of choice in how she may respond to her positioning, and this is where the *politics* of reading may ultimately be located.” (L. Pearce, 1995, pp. 169)

# Part One...

## Methods of Inquiry:

To speak of death and fashion (the killing of fashion: the fashioning of death) is to speak of dreams and fears at once: of dreaming and fearing as twins, of fashion and death - clasped, in a mortal embrace. As I set out in the Introduction, it is my aim to engage the various assumptions that orbit the twin[ed] ideas of fashion and death, and seemingly naturalize their often hidden isomorphism. To carry out this task I have had to adopt a battery of methods that conform to the slippery and multivalent nature of the fashion image. In this section, then, it is my wish to take you, the reader, through the most important methodological assumptions that shape the central analyses of this thesis.

"One cannot "choose" to step out of ideology," states Gayatri Spivak in her article "The Politics of Interpretations." As a writer, I am situated and very much invested in my two (broadly speaking) analyses: fashion (as both a consumer and follower of fashion and fashion magazines), and death (as a mortal and prone body). Thus, I have chosen methods that both facilitate and enhance this "subject[ive]" approach. Of primary interest to me in structuring this thesis is the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle - P. N. Medvedev, and V. N. Voloshinov. The Bakhtinian approach posits a dialectic of subject and language in/of ideology that moves beyond the stasis of Ferdinand de Saussure's formalism (language as super-structure) or the unreality of liberal-

humanism (language as infinitely pliable to the *mobile* will) and allows one to engage language in a manner that does not overdetermine either the sender or the receiver of language.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, though the Bakhtinian approach provides a rough outline to my overall apprehension of the studied material, it is in no way present in every analysis. Thus, I have structured this section as one which serves to provide focus to the primary methodological assumptions that are used throughout this thesis.

Although the term "assumption" is often seen in a rather negative academic light (as the act of assumption requires a leap of faith), I believe it to be the root of theory. For, unlike theory (*theorema* - to view), which is an overarching structure, or approach to a topic, assumption (*assumere* - to take) avoids such thoroughness and posits a shifting base from which to work. This work, based on founding assumptions, may or may not lead to the elucidation of a theory. On this principle I will lay out the three basic assumptions of this thesis. The first, grounded in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle, is the underlying assumption of this thesis: all communication is dialogic in nature -- communication cannot take place in a vacuum. The second assumption is that the basis of the Western episteme rides upon a fundamental binary of "masculine/feminine" which serves to further code thoughts and actions within our culture. This second assumption is informed by the recent writing of Elizabeth Grosz. Finally, the third founding assumption of this thesis builds upon and serves to focus the foregoing: the body of woman has been

<sup>23</sup>For further reading on the problems of the liberal-humanist approach to language - specifically on Wayne Booth's interpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin - please refer to: G. C. Spivak, "The Politics of Interpretations," *Other Worlds*, London: Routledge, 1988, pp. 118-133.

traditionally aligned with death, decay, and purity as an out-growth of her position as the lesser of the pair in the binarism "masculine/feminine," thus establishing her as an unstable (destabilizing) force within the epistemic structure. For this last assumption, the work of Elisabeth Bronfen will be consulted, especially the 1992 text, *Over Her Dead Body*.

Using this tripartite structure I will demonstrate that through analyses of the fashion image and its relation to death in this postmodern era, one is better able to understand the conflicted role played by the *feminine* body as either harbinger of death and insecurity, or the embodiment of beautiful perfection, within the culture of the fashion magazine. Moreover, we will come to see that because the fashion magazine continually strives, however unsuccessfully, for an authoritarian language -- a frozen dialect -- it is doomed to continually present its models as "dead" or static. In sum, there is an excess: the need for a solid(ified) language overflows into the representational pitfall of "death." In this excess, fashion's investment in the trope of femininity and death becomes clear, providing a solid basis for critique and study of the feminine body within the pages of the fashionable world.

## **Bakhtin: Politics of the Subject:**

Robert Stam writes in *Subversive Pleasures*: "To speak of language, without speaking of power, in a Bakhtinian perspective is to speak meaninglessly, in a void."<sup>24</sup> This thesis, as was outlined in the Introduction, will consider the problematic alignment of both fashion and death, as well as the fashion magazine's position in relation to these two issues. In exploring this relation there are two overarching methodological approaches adopted from Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle that inform my analyses: dialogism and ideology and the subject in culture. *Dialogism and Ideology* draws upon the work of V.N. Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973), in particular his discussion of the ideological underpinnings of language. The second section, dealing with the subject in culture, will grapple with the concept of the subject within culture and her/his apprehension of culture's ideological framework. Both sections will explore the dialogic understanding of the subject in culture, and how both Bakhtin and Voloshinov's conception of the subject differs from both structuralist and marxist accounts of the subject. Of consideration in this section is Bakhtin's concept of "the materiality of dialogue" as that which establishes the subject in and as culture.

8. <sup>24</sup>R. Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*, Baltimore, 1989, p.



## Dialogism and Ideology:

The scope of the dialogic is quite broad. For Voloshinov,<sup>25</sup> in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, the "...linchpin of the communicative process is the dialogic interaction between concrete utterances, a phenomenon which involves all forms of semiosis and not just face to face speech acts."<sup>26</sup> Because this conception of dialogue encompasses all forms of semiosis it follows that all

<sup>25</sup>It bears mentioning here that the work of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle has been caught up in a flurry of debate over attribution. Although not central to my concerns, I would like to both point out some salient aspects of the debate and to position myself in relation to these debates.

The question of attribution circles mainly around the following works, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*(1927), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*(1929) - both attributed to V.N. Voloshinov, and *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*(1928) - attributed to P.N. Medvedev. Primarily, the dispute between those who attribute all authorship to Bakhtin and those who would have Voloshinov and Medvedev credited with the works upon which their names were originally attached circles around questions of liberal-humanism and Marxism. The former 'Bakhtin' supporters, K. Clarke and M. Holquist chiefmost among this group, argue that the works of Bakhtin were penned under Voloshinov and Medvedev's names as a means of getting radical work past Soviet censors. However, getting published was not a problem for Bakhtin, as one can see that in the same year as *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* was published by Voloshinov, Bakhtin also released his volume on *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art* which apparently had no trouble passing the censors [for further reading please see G.S. Morson and C. Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, California: Stanford University Press, 1990]. The supporters of Voloshinov and Medvedev's authorship come from two distinct areas on the academic spectrum: first, liberal-humanist approaches often champion Bakhtin as separated from Voloshinov and Medvedev as a means of supporting a less Marxist approach to his works; while, others, see the sophisticated Marxist work of Medvedev and Voloshinov to be diluted by the (at times) liberal-humanist tendencies of Bakhtin.

I remain unresolved on the attribution of the texts of the Bakhtin Circle, and I see much of the debate to be a red-herring that shows no sign of ever (wholly) resolving itself. Nonetheless, for the rest of this paper I will defer to the pragmatic decisions of two Bakhtin scholars, Robert Stam and Lynne Pearce. Robert Stam remarks, "...the name Bakhtin will be used stenographically, to refer to Bakhtin himself together with his close collaborators, under the assumption that the works in question represent a mingling of voices, a view that strikes us a perfectly in keeping with the Bakhtinian conception of authorship." [R. Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 3]. Thus, I will refer to the original authors of these books (Medvedev, Bakhtin and Voloshinov) for bibliographic simplicity while at the same time referring - in short-hand - to the group as alternately Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle. I would direct the interested reader toward the books mentioned above as well as L. Pearce, *Reading Dialogics*, London: Edward Arnold, 1994., K. Clarke and M. Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, K. Hirschkop and D. Shepherd (eds.), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.

<sup>26</sup>Michael Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 12.

signifying practices fall into the domain of the dialogic. However, it is important to keep in mind that these speakers or communicators are not acting in a vacuum. 'Pure' meaning becomes *contaminated* by values, interests, and desires: "In actuality we never say or hear *words*, we say and hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on."<sup>27</sup>

Dialogism, as Voloshinov sees it, is an ideologically and value-laden exchange of signs. Not only is dialogue saturated with ideology, but it becomes the vehicle *par excellence* for the construction and contestation of ideology. Voloshinov states: "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present, too."<sup>28</sup> The act of signification - through language, writing, representing - is a motivated activity that is constantly inscribed with relations of power. Inflection, intonation and accent play an integral role in the delineation of power relations: "Although different classes may use the 'same' formal sign system, given signs are in fact subject to divergent ideological accents depending on the specific context of their usage - what [Voloshinov] terms the multi-accentuality of the social sign."<sup>29</sup> It is clear that language (and, arguably, other systems of signification) is not merely the manipulation of its constituent parts into a *sentence*, but relies heavily on the (subjective)

<sup>27</sup>V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (trans.), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986 (orig. 1929), pp. 70.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup>Michael Gardiner, 1992, p. 16.

enunciative position from which signification issues.

This idea of "ideological multi-accentuality" is very much opposed to Saussure's conception of language which has held a prominent position within structuralist theories of language.<sup>30</sup> There are three steps to be taken in the Saussurean approach to structuralism (and linguistics): first, enclose the corpus of study within a boundary (separate *langue* from *parole* - place *parole* to the side)<sup>31</sup>. Second, segment this corpus into signifying units (divide *langue* into units ie., morphemes and phonemes). And, finally, relate segmented units syntactically, through "a logic of transformation and condensation" (map units in terms of oppositional syntax).<sup>32</sup>

I bring up this opposition between Bakhtin and Saussure's conceptions of language primarily because it is a tension that is endemic to the fashion magazine and its position in culture.<sup>33</sup> The magazine aspires to the

<sup>30</sup> For more indepth reading on Saussure's structural linguistics in relation to the visual arts please see: Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's article, "Semiotics and Art History", *Art Bulletin*, June 1991. A comprehensive reading of structuralist linguistics and the limits of deconstruction can be found in, U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

<sup>31</sup> The concepts of *langue* and *parole* can be summarized thus, "For Saussure and the other 'objectivists'...the goal was to conceptualize language as a fixed system comprising certain phonetic, grammatical, and lexical forms. For this school, the given language system of a particular community constituted a discreet whole - what Saussure termed *langue* - which could be distinguished from the contingent and unique utterances of particular individuals - characterized as *parole*." Michael Gardiner, 1992, pp. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, 1991, pp. 192.

<sup>33</sup> I must make clear here, however, that both the concepts of formalism and dialogism are mere frameworks through which language is apprehended. Thus, no language can be said to be "really" one or the other. Nonetheless, with the discourses of truth and power, it is the "authoritarian" language of formalism - with its exclusions and blind-spots - that makes attempts to both bolster and maintain hegemonic discourses of power and purity within the linguistic system. Language cannot be *made* to be either formal or dialogic, but can be utilized in such a way as to provide the *illusion* of either formalist or dialogic principles.

presentation of a whole system, a totalized vocabulary that is overwritten by "this" month's fashion statement:

As fashion turns the corner into the late '90s, the driving force is a relaxed individualism...There is no single must-have colour (though it would be nice to try out *something*), no pressure to go after the most exuberant prints we've seen in years - just an injunction to go after what suits you best and makes you happiest. Which is why the cool, measured minimalism of Jil Sander...coexists as an equally valid fashion choice with something as eye-sockingly bright as the prints on pages 282-289...<sup>34</sup>

The tension between the [structural] world of the fashion magazine and the [not-so-neat] outside world resides in the hassle of wrinkled fabrics, broken nails and fallen hair. It seems easy in the fashion magazine to airily decide between the structuralism of Jil Sander<sup>35</sup> and the eye-socking Prada Prints<sup>36</sup>, but that is only a decision that can be made within a fashion magazine.<sup>37</sup> As

<sup>34</sup>*Harper's Bazaar*, summer fashion statement - March 1996, p. 269. Although it could be argued that I am being both unduly harsh and overly simplistic in my judgement of the use of language in the fashion magazine, I feel that although, as Leslie Rabine contends, the fashion magazine is now much more self-reflexive and attentive to the issues that impact their reader's lives on a daily basis it can still be safely said that the fashion magazine, considered on its own, inhabits a space outside the everyday. Thereby, the fashion magazine can be understood as a closed system, when considered *only in relation to itself*.

<sup>35</sup>Jil Sander: a line of clothes noted for its simplicity of design and modernist approach to fabric. The major selling point of the Jil Sander collection is Jil Sander's image as a hard-nosed "serious" designer who made it on her own in an industry ruled by men. Jil Sander's line sells between 500\$ US (prêt a porter) and 2500\$US (couture).

<sup>36</sup>Prada, and Italian design house run by the Prada family, is well known for the bold prints introduced in 1995. The prints were reminiscent of the polyester patterns of the mid-seventies. In 1995 Prada also introduced "uniform chic," which were ensembles constructed like delivery-man and waitress uniforms.

<sup>37</sup>Of course, one could contend that it is a decision that can be made in the shop if you have the money. However, the fashion magazine presents the shifts from one designer to the next as seamless: there is no need to travel to a different department store, nor to fight over items of clothes, no need to go on a waiting list for Chanel - no need. As Alix Brown laments in her article "The Fashion Olympics," *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1997, "Fall, it seemed, had begun without me. I hadn't even heard the starter's pistol go off. Hadn't I already missed out on that zip-front navy wool coat-jacket at Miu Miu? (The girl at the store said that she'd be happy to

we will see further on, the *solidification* of the fashion language into the formalist system of Saussure, is a sleight of hand that is necessary for the proper functioning of the fashion magazine within culture. This stable and authoritative, which is to say monologic, language disallows the flux of the *real*, allowing the beautiful stasis of the frozen, or more pointedly, *the dead*.

However, as Voloshinov points out, it is the "linguistic praxis" of day-to-day speech that must be examined if one is to understand the "living, dynamic reality of language and its social functions." [Voloshinov 1973 p. 82] As we discussed above, Voloshinov holds communication to encompass "all forms of semiosis" and not just the face-to-face speech act. Thus, it becomes clear that although the fashion magazine has set itself up as the epitome of a closed and ideally monologic system, it cannot escape the "ceaseless flow of becoming" that semiosis imparts on its carefully constructed spreads. Regardless, fashion's insistence on a language based on the monologic (authoritative) utterance must be interrogated on its own terms. As I will argue, it is this attempt at a timeless 'fixed' language that serves to bolster the alignment of death and femininity within the fashion magazine. A double task emerges through this view of semiosis: the first must ask how the frozen *micro*-system of fashion works within the living *process* of language (or semiotics); the second must move within the borders of this *micro*-system as a means of understanding the (over) determination of *femininity* within the pages of the fashion magazine - decoding, if you will, the messages that are present within this totalized system

put my name on the list for a pair of burgundy open-toed platform Mary Janes -- yeah, down at the bottom.) This was serious." pp. 206. Models, in the world of the fashion magazine have no such cares.

as it enters the "...dynamic reality of language and its social functions." [Ibid.]

Through the analyses it will become clear that the act of signification is an ideologically saturated act. Although the fashion magazine may defend itself from its critics by insisting on its closed and epiphenomenal nature ("...it's *just* a fashion magazine...") - and, indeed, it is with this assumption that much significant writing on fashion has been carried out (see Roland Barthes, *System de la Mode*<sup>38</sup>), it cannot escape the ideological action of signification in language. As Voloshinov stresses throughout *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, signification is ideological in nature, "Existence reflected in the sign is not merely reflected but refracted" [V.N Voloshinov, 1973, p. 23], and, as such, signs can shift their meanings depending on the position from which they emanate, or, from which they are apprehended.

To augment this view of signification as multi-faceted and multi-valenced I turn to Raymond Williams's concept of ideology. As Williams states in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), "...no mode of production and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention."<sup>39</sup> Although dominant ideologies may maintain a hegemonic grip on a culture at certain times in certain periods, they can only

<sup>38</sup>Barthes engages this idea of Fashion as epiphenomenal as he see its constant self-re-definition to make *the Fashion* immaterial. Thus he states, "...the synchrony of Fashion is established by Fashion itself: the fashion of a year. We have chosen to work here on magazines from the year 1958-1959, but this date *obviously* has no methodological importance...for we are not attempting to describe some Fashion but *Fashion in general*. As soon as it is gathered, extracted from its year, the raw material (the utterance) must take its place in a purely formal system of functions..." R. Barthes, *The Fashion System*, New York: Hill and Wang, trans. M. Ward and R. Howard, 1983, pp. 10-11. Emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup>R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1977, pp. 125.

do so through the silencing and marginalization of continually erupting and emergent ideologies. Janet Wolff makes a clear summary of William's observation of the manifold levels upon which ideology operates in society:

Alternative ideologies may be either *residual* (formed in the past, but still active in the cultural process), or *emergent* (the expression of new groups outside the dominant group); they may also be either *oppositional* (challenging the dominant ideology), or *alternative* (co-existing with it).<sup>40</sup>

Within the micro-system of the fashion magazine these conflicts play themselves out in the constant negotiation of the larger structure of the fashion magazine and its smaller constituent parts: the fashion image and the advertisement. Further, this 'ideologic inter-play' can also be witnessed in the varied reception of the fashion magazine by its readers.

Therefore, the authoritarian/monologic language of the fashion magazine is continually thwarted by the unpredictability of the unsystematic (dialogic) nature of living language. Within the following analyses we will come to see that this unpredictable relation opens a space within the otherwise over-determined pages of the fashion magazine for contestational or symptomatic readings of the fashionable image. In the discrepancy between monologic intention and dialogic reading the structural dependence of the fashion magazine on the (dead) body of woman becomes visible.

### **The Subject In Culture:**

The ideological and social over-determination of signs, power relations that are always already present in the use of language, are interesting when

<sup>40</sup>J. Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, London: Macmillan, 1981, pp. 53.

considered in light of reading fashion. The fashion magazine presents the reader with a vocabulary that is [structurally] self-contained yet is constantly being exploded into the dialogic space of real life. If we agree with Dale Bauer, who states that "...[dialogism] is an epistemology which, like 'standpoint theory', believes that 'context' and 'positionality' are all,"<sup>41</sup> then the language of fashion depends upon both the producer and consumer, and the relation therein, to produce meaning.<sup>42</sup>

The trick - so to speak - of reading fashion within a dialogic framework is to not lose sight of the two poles that exist at either end of a continuum: compliance and contestation. Both the fashion magazine and the consumer are in constant negotiation of these two spaces - even within their highly structured 'language', fashion magazines, as we will see, are able to contradict themselves and proffer alternate [contesting] view points. This constant negotiation of contestation and compliance seeps into all aspects of social relations both within cultural production and (more noticeably) between *bodies*. Manoeuvring between these two poles creates a tension that constantly demands us to position ourselves and, although tense, this positioning is productive of the space of discourse. States Diane Price Herndl in "The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic": "meaning is created not through a

<sup>41</sup>D. Bauer, *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 2.

<sup>42</sup>This view stands in contradistinction to the work of G. McCracken who states, "...the code [of clothing] has no generative capacity. Its users enjoy no combinatorial freedom...The code specified not only the components of the message, but also the messages themselves. These messages come, as it were, prefabricated." G. McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, Indiana, 1990, pp. 66.



single voice, but in the interaction of voices - that is, in dialogue."<sup>43</sup> This split is integral to the understanding of Bakhtin. "Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context."<sup>44</sup> Upon this boundary the focus shifts subtly from signification and semiosis to the subject and culture. Wherefore we turn to our next area of interrogation - the subject in culture.

The body within culture is constantly bombarded with injunctions, or, in a more Althusserian vein, is *hailed* by culture. However, this 'hailing' or interpellation<sup>45</sup> of the subject differs substantially in the works of Althusser and Bakhtin. It is on Bakhtin's interpretation of the subject's interaction with alien voices and their subsequent "ideological becoming" that I would like to focus. Here, I am continuing the project begun in my discussion of ideology - the questions of structuralist and Bakhtinian concepts of the subject and their relation to the reading of the fashion magazine.

The problem with Althusser's conception of the subject within [ideological] culture is that he posits a subject pinioned by the ideological

<sup>43</sup>D. P. Herndl, "The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic," D. Bauer and S. McKinstry eds., *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*, New York, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup>M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 284.

<sup>45</sup>Interpellation: the term invoked by Louis Althusser to describe the ways in which individual subjects are 'called up', 'hailed' or 'recruited' by the ideologies circulating in their society." For further reading refer to: L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971). Cited in Lynne Pearce, 1994, p. 65. For further reading on the role of interpellation in consumer culture, especially with regard to the fashion industry, please refer to R. Leiberma's (hilarious) article, "Shopping Disorders," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, B. Massumi (ed.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 244-265.

structures surrounding the subject. Althusser states:

...ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation that I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which may be imagined along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there'.<sup>46</sup>

The subject is transformed as an integrated self, always already 'whole' at the threshold of the ideological recruiting office. However, Bakhtin's conception of the subject in culture differs substantially from Althusser's conception of the subject as merely the surface effect of a deep epistemic structure - a view strongly held in Althusser's Lacanian conception of the subject.<sup>47</sup> Bakhtin, on the other hand, posits a subject to which the concept of 'hailing' is antithetical. The Bakhtinian subject is capable of constant negotiation within ideological structures; indeed this negotiation is inescapable as it is a negotiation which is bound to our understanding of speech. Michael Gardiner in his book *The Dialogics of Critique* presents a clear and cogent summary of the differences between Bakhtin and Althusser. To quote at length:

...the 'self' for Bakhtin is not constituted through a unified, monadic relation to the external world; rather, the phenomenon of 'self-ness' is

<sup>46</sup>L. Pearce, 1994, pp. 48.

<sup>47</sup>Rhonda Leiberman reformulates both Althusser's and Bakhtin's concept of ideological interaction (either "hailing" or "dialogue") in her formulation of the "Abject Shopper." States Leiberman, "Late this century abject shopping syndrome ("Buy something. You're worth it.") resulted from long-term exposure of humans to commodity interpellation....today's disordered consumer obeys an interpellation that remains absent, like a mouthpiece from the beyond; the harmful voice issues from the insatiable inarticulate orifices detached from any recognizable body....Abjection thrives as long as the body in question is stuck in the impasse between wanting to be recognized and loved as the supplement to a commodity fetish and wanting to be loved as it "really" is (that is, like the spectator of the ad, the fleshy remainder unknown to and radically excluded from the representational plenitude enjoyed by beautifully packaged products). "Shopping Disorders," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, B. Massumi (ed.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 252.

constituted through the operation of a dense and conflicting network of discourses, cultural and social practices and institutional structures, which are themselves bound up with the intricate phenomenology of the self-other relation. And since this process is fundamentally historical and not a singular 'event', it is continuous and 'mobile' - which is why the subject in Bakhtin's eyes is unfinalized...in a perpetual state of 'becoming'.<sup>48</sup>

It is this "perpetual state of becoming" that wrests the subject from the pre-determined grip of a single "primal" interpellation. The diverse and manifold channels through which subjects come into contact with culture foreclose a monolithic account of culture/ideology in this instance. Ideology, as Althusser theorizes it, can only operate with the basic assumption of a general history, culture, and ideology;<sup>49</sup> but within Bakhtin's theory "...subjects do not have a general relation to reality, but only a 'regional' or localized one..." and, thus, become agents [neither totally free nor totally bound by culture] implicated in their negotiation of culture.<sup>50</sup>

When considering the manner in which Bakhtin theorizes the subject -

<sup>48</sup>M. Gardiner, 1992, p. 165.

<sup>49</sup>Gramsci's important formulation of ideology and the ways in which ideology functions upon the subject through *hegemony*, is not dealt with in this thesis as it does not lend itself as fully to my analyses as Bakhtin's. For further reading on Gramsci please see: S. Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1986, pp. 5-27; E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 1985; A. McRobbie, "Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies: A Post-script," in *Cultural Studies*, L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. Treichler (eds.), London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 719-730.

<sup>50</sup>For further reading on the difficult position held by language between the individual and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) I recommend the writings of Michel Pêcheux, a student of Althusser and a writer on the relation of language to ideology: M. Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, London: St. Martin's Press, 1982. See also, M. Montgomery and S. Allen, "Ideology, Discourse, and Cultural Studies: The Contribution of Michel Pêcheux," in *The Canadian Journal of Communications*, <http://www.cbsp.sfu.ca/calj/cjc/BackIssues/17.2/montgome.html>

the body - in the space of culture and ideology, it is very important to consider not only the ways in which the subject *becomes* cultured, but also the ways we learn to operate in culture. The concept of dialogism is, as has been amply demonstrated above, an extremely subject-centred theory. Dialogics is a theory which takes as its basic assumption the notion that the entire gamut of social and cultural phenomena is profoundly intersubjective (I/Thou) - a continual dialogue with the 'other'.<sup>51</sup> This approach to the understanding of the subject in constant negotiation with the competing discourses of the other[s] is especially provocative when one comes to consider the consumption of the fashion image. If we can methodologically posit a subject that can not be consistently and uniformly hailed by ideology, then could we not posit the same for the fashion image? To explain: as we have seen, the Bakhtinian subject, unlike the Althusserian subject, is constantly changing through contact with the other, and, if up to this point we understand that the fashion magazine's ability to produce meaning is structurally dependant on an external consumer (for everything living is external to a totalized system), then it becomes clear that the effect and reading of the fashion image becomes, like the subject through which it comes 'to life', multiform and non-monolithic. The magazine enters into the dialogic space of the living through the reader[s]; it then becomes part of a living system, a system prone to leaks and excesses. In other words, the fashion magazine can be said to be a totalizing entity only in a theoretical space where all consumers are senseless dupes and all magazine

<sup>51</sup>M. Gardiner, 1992, p. 72.

editors are omnipotent. Thankfully, this is not the case.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the point that dialogism is not “pluralism.” We cannot all access the power of language, because all languages do not have access to power. Thus, in our daily lives, as we communicate with others and engage with the cultural texts that constantly engage us, we are positioned in hierarchies of power. These hierarchies draw upon fundamental divisions within culture, and although one may engage with these power-divisions in a “site-specific/mobile” manner (as opposed to Althusser’s single “interpellation”) one will find certain continuities within the structure of power in language. It is this continuity of power that I would like to now discuss through the work of Elizabeth Grosz.

## Elizabeth Grosz:

Sexual differences, like those of class and race, are bodily differences but in order to acknowledge their fundamentally social and cultural "nature", the body must be reconceived, not in opposition to culture but as its preeminent object.<sup>52</sup>

In two of Grosz's most recent books, *Volatile Bodies* (1994), and *Space Time and Perversion* (1995), questions of the material body are explored.<sup>53</sup> She asks how this sexed object/subject [this body], is implicated, in its differential sexing, in various discourses? From her study of the classical construction of space as outlined in Plato's *Timaeus* to Western knowledge's construction on the basis of structural binarisms, it becomes clear that there are two positions to be occupied within Western thought, the (perfect) male and the (imperfect) female.<sup>54</sup> These binaries relate to the body via the classic distinction between form and matter. The Form [to be read as masculine] is of the realm of ideas, "the above-the-mundane", whereas matter [to be read as feminine] is the bodily, the corporeal and unpredictable. It is in this material [bodily] position that women have been placed to act as "guardians" for the [disembodied] body of

<sup>52</sup>Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, London, 1995, p. 32. Further page references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>53</sup>The work of Elizabeth Grosz grows out of a tradition of deconstructive and psychoanalytic feminism with a long history. It is important to recognize the work of theorists such as Luce Irigaray who informs much of Grosz' theory, and who initially engaged writers such as Plato, Freud, Lacan and Derrida, and held these texts up to an informed feminist scrutiny. Also of note is the work of Derrida which has an undeniably strong influence on Grosz' deconstructive strategies. The writing of M. Gatens (*Imaginary Bodies*, 1996 ) and Susan Bordo (*Gender/Body/Knowledge. Feminist Constructions of Being and Knowing*, 1989) also stand out and an extremely cogent analyses of the construction of a mind/body dualism within the Western episteme.

<sup>54</sup>States Grosz: "[Plato] sets up a series of binary oppositions that will mark the character of Western thought...which may all be regarded as versions of the distinction between the (perfect) world of reason and the (imperfect) material world." Grosz 1995, p. 113.

man:

[Women]...become the living representatives of corporeality, of domesticity, of the natural order that men have had to expel from their own self-representations in order to construct themselves as above-the-mundane. (Grosz 1995, p. 122)

There is a paradox here: the male, on the one hand, disavows his material body while, on the other hand establishing his 'body' as the central [neutral] body of all thought.<sup>55</sup> Of special importance to my project is Grosz's focus on the male disavowal of the body within patriarchal culture, and how this disavowal serves to further align the feminine with the bodily, the corporeal and, ultimately, the 'unpredictability' of death.

The "...elevation of the mind as a disembodied term"<sup>56</sup> has foreclosed any theorization of how a specific body (usually white and male) has produced a hegemonic discourse of knowing. More disturbingly, the body of woman has not only been avoided in theoretical discussion, but Woman [upper-case, singular] has been seen as the antithesis of the philosophical project, "philosophy's eternal enigma."<sup>57</sup> Plato, in his doctrine of the Forms, refers to the [material] body as a "...betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind." (Grosz, 1994, p. 5) As discussed above, it is Woman who occupies the conceptual position of body. Woman is somehow more corporeal, more

<sup>55</sup>When I refer to the masculine pronoun in my discussion of the patriarchal foundations of Western thought, I am not necessarily aiming indiscriminately at all men, everywhere and at every time. Rather, I use the masculine to point towards the undeniably male-centredness of Western knowledges.

<sup>56</sup>Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana, 1994, pp. 4. Page references to this volume will be given after quotations in the text.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid..

natural than man:

The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services. (Grosz 1994, p. 14)

Woman, established as naturally and biologically inferior to man, serves the patriarchal structure well: it is her body that can absorb and facilitate the bodies and lives of men. But it is men's ability to reason (a by-product of their closeness to the realm of Forms) that saves Woman from her (unpredictable, death-bound) self. "Knowledge" is embodied; the construction of the way we think and represent thought is a product of very specific interests that create a structure -- one which constantly disavows its own construction through claims of transparency and neutrality. However, transparency and neutrality are no longer tenable when knowledge is seen as steeped in (an embodied [male]) sexuality.

In this thesis it is integral to recognize this split in the construction of masculinity and femininity. For it is this split that preserves, as we have seen, a series of untenable distinctions between man and woman; distinctions which, moreover, continually align the woman with the lesser of a pair of binary distinctions (*mind over matter*, *reason over passion*, *life over death*) in a manoeuvre to secure a dominant position for the masculine term. States Grosz, "Women are thus conceptualized as castrated, lacking and incomplete, as if these were inherently qualities (or absences) of their (natural) bodies rather than a function of men's self representations." (E. Grosz, 1995, pp. 38). Indeed, it is through the various modes of representation within our Western culture that



we can see the overflow of representation that has been conferred upon the body of Woman. From film to magazine advertisements there is a well documented consistency in the manner in which the female body is displayed. She is watched, pursued, admired, admonished (as a threat to the phallus), identified with, and feared from afar: she watches herself being watched. (see: M. Doane, L. Mulvey and B. Gordon).

Nonetheless, although this consistency exists, it is not a monolithic and self-contained schemata. It is always in flux - a practice prone to inconsistencies. Thus, we will study the areas where the dominant text belies its investment in its "objects"; not in hopes of "exposing" a positive, radical re-reading, but in hopes of finding sites where the disparity between naturalized representations of women in fashion and the text that surround them mis-match one another. In this mis-matching, one can examine the discrepancies between representation and text, discrepancies which will reveal an over-investment in the trope of Woman as "perfected in death" in a text which demands stasis to facilitate an authoritative description of "the fashion."

## Elisabeth Bronfen:

Elisabeth Bronfen's work on the alignment of death and femininity overwrites this methods section,<sup>58</sup> serving to focus the work of both Bakhtin and Grosz within this thesis. Bronfen recognizes the large psychic role that death plays in shaping our culture's view of the *feminine*, as well as how that view is shaped in relation to the many discursive structures that serve to normalize this apprehension. In this section I would like to briefly discuss the writing of Bronfen and her analyses of the psychic roles played by death and femininity within Western culture.

Representations of death necessarily engage questions about power: its locus, its authenticity, its sources, and how it is passed on.<sup>59</sup>

In this discussion of Bronfen's writing I am going to limit my comments to her work on the spectator in relation to images of death. More specifically, I will be considering the *power-plays* that necessarily take place in representations of death. This decision to limit my discussion to questions of power has been made because within the central analyses of this thesis I deal with many more of her concepts, all of which are predicated on the concept of "power".

<sup>58</sup>Bronfen's work on the concept of death and femininity has many antecedents. Psychoanalysis, especially an informed (feminist) reading of Freud, plays a large role in the work of Bronfen. However, it is her sense of Derridian deconstructive practices, coupled with a formal approach to visual texts, that is most clearly seen throughout her writing. One can also see a commitment to the 1986 project of Bram Dijkstra, and his analyses of the representation of "feminine evil" at the fin-de-siecle: *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>59</sup>E. Bronfen, S. Goodwin, *Death and Representation*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 5. All further references to this book will be given in brackets next to the citation.

Elisabeth Bronfen takes a close look at the coding of death and femininity in her 1992 book, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. We are taken through a series of investigations that have as their objective the revelation of the deeply embedded link that exists between 'death/dying' and femininity. These investigations draw together a number of divergent cultural texts under a method of psychoanalysis and semiotics: texts such as Gabriel von Max's *Der Anatom* (1869), Edgar Allen Poe's 'Ligeria' (1838), Alfred Hitchcock's adaptation of 'Ligeria', *Vertigo* (1958), and the construction of the dead muse in the writing of women such as Virginia Woolf (Judith Shakespeare, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929), Mary Sarton (Virginia Woolf, "Letter From Chicago," 1953), Anne Sexton (Sylvia Plath, "Sylvia's Death," 1966) and Sylvia Plath ("Lady Lazarus", 1962). The link that is drawn is summed up by Bronfen in a cogent passage in her preface. To quote at length:

Narrative and visual representations of death, drawing their material from a common cultural image repertoire, can be read as symptoms of our culture. Furthermore, because the feminine body is culturally constructed as the ultimate site of alterity, culture uses art to dream the death of beautiful women. Over representations of the dead feminine body, culture can repress and articulate its unconscious knowledge of death which it fails to foreclose even as it cannot express it directly. If symptoms are failed repressions, representations are symptoms that visualize even as they conceal what is too dangerous to articulate openly but too fascinating to repress successfully. They repress by localizing death away from the self, at the body of a beautiful woman, at the same time that this representation lets the repressed return, albeit in a disguised manner.<sup>60</sup>

There is a need to displace the hard reality of death onto a cipher, transferring the instability of death into a system of symbols and signs within which it can

<sup>60</sup>E. Bronfen, 1992, pp. xi.

be manipulated and, thus, "controlled."

Bronfen engages psychoanalytic theory as a means of discussing the concept of the feminine in relation to death. It becomes clear that the concepts of death and femininity both share well-theorized positions in the annals of psychoanalysis.<sup>61</sup> The feminine, as is demonstrated, is the site of both confirmation and destabilization of the self (Bronfen, 1992, pp. 11). *She* confirms wholeness and unity as the spectral *phallic mother* ("wholeness...constructed over a post-natal lacunae" *ibid.*) while at the same time embodying the [so-called] *fundamental* lack [of phallus]; "...female genitals have, however, also served as a privileged trope for lack, castration, and split and by metonymic association, as a trope for decay, disease and fatality." (*ibid.*).<sup>62</sup>

Death, through its association with the trope of the feminine (as articulated in psychoanalysis) is controlled, and its threat (to the masculine - both as an affirmation of *his* mortality and *his* embodiedness) is displaced onto the figure of the beautiful [female] corpse. This move is one which articulates a massive occlusion of feminine subjectivity and disavowal of death in the name of protecting what Grosz had earlier termed men's "...now-disavowed physicality... [their] conceptual supremacy..." (E. Grosz, 1995, pp. 38.). Luce

<sup>61</sup> "Freud has termed 'death' and 'femininity' as the two most consistent and enigmatic tropes in Western culture." E. Bronfen, 1992, pp. 11. See also, S. Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (SE)*, J. and A. Strachey trans., London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute for Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974, pp. 7-64.

<sup>62</sup> For further discussion of the castration complex and its relationship to femininity see: "The Subjective Import of the Castration Complex," J. Lacan and the *école freudienne*, *Feminine Sexuality*, J. Mitchell and J. Rose (eds.), J. Rose (trans.), London: The MacMillan Press, 1982.

Irigaray also notes the transference of this dual role of affirmer (of life)/harbinger (of death) to the body of Woman:

So "woman" can function as place -- evanescent beyond, point of discharge -- as well as time -- eternal return, temporal detour -- for the sublimation and, if possible, mastery of the work of death. She will also be the representative-representation (*Vorstellung-Repräsentanz*), in other words, of the death drives that cannot (or theoretically could not) be perceived without horror, that the eye (of) consciousness refuses to recognize.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, within this rather complex psychic schema, we can arrive at two points when viewing representations of death: the first is the semantically encoded dead body (death as metaphor - moving away from the corpse) or death as violent reality (the puncturing of language).

To explain the distinction between the semantic and the real, I turn to Bronfen's discussion of Jacques Lacan's *point de caption* and Roland Barthes' *punctum*. In the presence of death the *real* must be translated into the realm of signs - to be read - but in this shift we lose touch with the (private) real even as it is translated, since it is incommensurable with the (public) realm of signs. Bronfen states, "The threat that real death poses...is antidoted through representations that 'exteriorise' this real by transferring it on to an image signifier" (Bronfen, 1992, pp. 46). This transference is a "captation" in the tradition of Lacan's formulation of the *point de caption*, wherein "...at certain privileged points, the mobility of a chain of signifiers comes to be arrested, or

<sup>63</sup>L. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G. G. Gill, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 55.

fixed onto a signified.”<sup>64</sup> This fixation is a psychic “necessity” insofar as it blocks full empathy with a loss that is unknowable, a real which simultaneously destroys the real. Nonetheless, representations of death can also puncture through the tight web of semantics that stabilize death’s place within the symbolic structure. This *punctum*, as Barthes’ called it, could be seen as the “obtuse meaning...a moment or detail of an image that wounds any obvious meaning, that points beyond the semantic fixture, because it is discontinuous, indifferent to the narrative, and has ‘at least a distancing effect with regard to the referent, to “reality” as nature’”.<sup>65</sup> Through rupture, we collide with a panoply of meaning -- overflowing semantic stability, moving beyond the encoded.

As one can observe, there are two channels, two areas upon which we can focus in the observance of death: the semantic and the real. Both options are cut through with the fissures of paradox: in apprehending an image are we ever privy to the real? can we know anything other than the artist’s desire to transform *his* death drive into a narcissistic monument -- “raising his own tomb” in the hopes of avoiding death?<sup>66</sup> In the end, I believe that we cannot avoid an oscillation between these two points, as we are simultaneously bound

<sup>64</sup>Please see J. Laplanche and S. Leclaire, “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study,” *Yale French Studies*, 48, 1975, pp. 118-175. The term ‘*point de captation*’ refers to the attachments that hold upholstery down. Cited in E. Bronfen, 1992, pp. 46.

<sup>65</sup>For further reading on the concept of the *punctum* see R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

<sup>66</sup>L. Irigaray, 1985, pp. 54. Irigaray further remarks, “This new detour along the road to death, through/for the construction of narcissistic monuments, involves pulling the libido back from the object onto the self and desexualizing it so it can carry out more sublimated activities.”

to language and ever cognizant (no matter how obliquely) of the *real* event that is taking place. Elaine Scarry points to just this argument, stating: "...the inherent instability of the verbal (and visual) sign is that a representation can work in two ways; it can coax real pain into visibility or push it into further invisibility."<sup>67</sup>

In representing the death of beautiful women, as we will see, it is stability that is figured by her body, her figure. For she becomes a sign unto herself: her ability to signify, in the fantasy of representation, is stifled. It is her role to play the docile body to the artist, the surgeon, the viewer. We hear echoes of Grosz: woman is, again, the *sign* not the signifier - she must "stand-in" for his body; she must play corpse to allay *his* fear of death. But, as Bronfen points out, this reassurance is deeply conflicted; just as death is the site of the most 'real' aspect of our lives, beginning as it does at birth, it is also the most tropic because it cannot be known except as sign(s). Bronfen states:

Non-negotiable and non-alterable, death is the limit of language, disrupting our sign system and image repertoire. Signifying nothing, it silently points to the indetermination of meaning so that one can speak of death only by speaking other. As the point where all language fails it is also the source of all allegorical speaking. (Bronfen, 1992, pp. 54)

This paradox is also resonant with the position of woman as "sign", for if she is a privileged link to the 'real' or, more tellingly, the *corporeal*, then this (supposed) 'real' must necessarily shatter as one places her into the *symbolic* orbit of terms that will always shroud her dead body.

<sup>67</sup>E. Scarry, *The Body In Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 14. This book explores the relation between concepts of pain and healing within Western medical discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries.

# Conclusion - into the garment...

To conclude this section, I would like to draw together these three methods into an accessible "approach" to the coming analyses. Death, as we have seen, is a deeply conflicted cultural discourse. Representing both the "end" of life and, as such, a pre-eminent occupation of the living, death (as a psychological and physical event) is central to Western culture's imagining. In approaching images of death, especially images of beautiful dead women, one must remain cognizant of the precedents, motives, and effects of such images. This methods section has established a means of analyzing images of death. It takes into account both the larger structures of language, and the structural dependencies of 'authoritative' languages on a static or deadened object. Through examining Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle's theorization of ideology, and the individual's engagement with ideology, I have come to see that the 'language game' is far from monolithic, allowing the individual in language many different channels through which she/he may come to terms with the various ideological structures surrounding her/him.

Through approaching both language and the body as many-layered texts of conflicting desires it becomes possible to more adequately address the often difficult reading of monologic texts. As we will see, advertising and the structural "being" of the fashion magazine, because they can never be 'solid' or 'whole', engage each other in an internal dialogue which is, in many instances, contradictory. It is this contradiction, and the critical reader's ability to insert his/herself into the space of contradiction, which allows divergent readings of



the fashion text. In this insertion, the reader and language come face to face -- one is positioned in relation to, and by, the other. Thus, an engagement with the (supposedly) monologic language of fashion, at the points where it is no longer perfect (where its perfect "grammar" no longer works) gives one the chance to re-work the ideas presented.

Though this re-working does not seek to read "against the grain" it does aim to read the grain for its lack of 'fit' in the text which it appears. To do this means not to magically absolve the fashion magazine of responsibility in the production of its images, but to find points in these images where the conceit of death (and thus fashion's aspirations to fixity) becomes clear. To open the discourse of fashion to such a reading means to hold it up to a scrutiny while recognizing the important role it plays within our own conceptions of the body in culture: engaging immanent tropes within the text while, at the same time, recognizing the importance of the original (monologic) context, will in the end allow us access to a representational schema that is as diverse as it is powerful.

Fashion is not just about the way we dress, as you, the reader, will see. It is now, more than ever before, a heterogenous terrain through which many discourses cut a path, a terrain upon which the imagination of a culture can be most visibly apprehended. Fashion magazines and their editors and writers know that the discourse of commodity is no longer contained within a modern capitalistic structure of product and consumer. The product, as will be demonstrated, is as much about lifestyle and "world-view" as it is about cut, hem-line and texture. Much like Western culture's desire for romance, fashion is bound-up with the way one understands one's life. As Lynne Pearce states in

her book, *Romance Revisited* (1995), "An engagement with the narratives of romance...facilitates the re-scripting of other areas of life."<sup>68</sup> Admittedly, not everyone in Western culture has the privilege of engaging the discourse of lifestyle. Much as our culture is loathe to admit it, there are people who go without food or shelter -- making *style* seem not only superfluous, but insulting. However, within what could broadly be called a 'privileged' segment of society, the profusion of images, for better or worse, conditions our responses to such social realities as poverty and hunger. Thus, in a culture consumed by, and consumptive of, images, one can't help but be engaged by fashion: whether one chooses to analyze this engagement or not is left to one's own peril.

*Everything that is daring and new seems to be happening under the cover of a kind of familiarity that shatters when you get up close. This may be revolution by stealth - but it is taking place.*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup>L. Pearce, *Romance Revisited*, New York: New York University Press, 1995, pp. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Monthly fashion statement, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995, pp. 267.

# Part Two...

## Introduction:

"Death Makes it Big" states Canadian youth-culture magazine *Shift*, in a summer 1996 editorial discussing the explosion of "Real Life Drama" and "Human Disaster" videos in the past three years.<sup>70</sup> Later in the magazine we are presented with a fashion spread featuring two women, both dead, one shot between the eyes, the other spread across the hood of the car (Figure 60). Western culture is in a mortal embrace with fetishized violence and glorified [beautiful] pain. In the past ten years an aesthetic of violence has made itself very much felt on the West's cultural matrix. The popularity of films such as *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarentino), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone), *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch) and *Crash* (David Cronenberg) attest to at least a cinematic obsession with death. However, culture, being the diaphanous and leaky system that it is, makes it impossible to contain popular styles within just one genre. *Twin Peaks*, *X-Files*, *Millennium*, and *e.r.* draw the television audience into a spiralling world of violence that is at times critical, at times gratuitous. On the World Wide Web, necrophilia guide books, "snuff"<sup>71</sup> porn, and 'real death' sites proliferate. Predictably, fashion is very much involved in this

<sup>70</sup>E. Solomon, "Death Makes It Big," *Shift*, vol. 4, number 5, pp. 8.

<sup>71</sup> The genre of pornography known as "snuff" films, involves the actor (almost exclusively female) either being killed or (more infrequently) killing herself at the moment of climax. There is presently a debate surrounding the perceived "explosion" of snuff films, as many believe the occurrence of 'true' snuff films (in which the actor *really* gets murdered) to be very rare - debate is continuing at alt.sex.sm as of January 15th 1997.

popularization of the death aesthetic. Although fashion has had its own heady romances with violence and death in the seventies,<sup>72</sup> the frequency and intensity of fashion's engagement with death in the nineties is remarkable. British style magazine *The Face*, in June 1994, presented its summer line of clothes in a photo shoot that featured the models (male and female) as either violently abused or dead. This photo shoot made allusions to suicide pacts, snuff films, heroin overdoses and car accidents: death was certainly a selling point. In *Harper's Bazaar* (Summer 1996), Amber Veleta is photographed as if by a coroner - "Killer Swimsuits" the article proclaims. Her eyes have been blacked-out, her body withered away to the horrific proportions of a corpse (figure 58). Another issue of *Bazaar* advertises "The Furs" (November 1995), in which we follow the bewildered model through a series of shots outlining her terrified flight through barren grass-lands; a flight ending in death. She is photographed dead (in furs) being eaten by a flock of crows (figure 59). We have been inundated by death - a flood of images to sell clothes, to entertain, provoke and inscribe.

"Postmodernity is no longer an age in which bodies produce commodities, but where commodities produce bodies."<sup>73</sup> These bodies, however they are produced by the commodity, seem to have a problem: they

<sup>72</sup> For example, "... In a 1972 spread for the short-lived but adventurous magazine, *Nova*, Bob Richardson produced a pictorial narrative which concluded with Angelica Huston's 'suicide'... she is sprawled across a motel bed, pills scattered, while at the bottom of the page, disinterested type states the designer of her clothes." K. dePerthuis, 1996.

<sup>73</sup> Arthur and Marilouise Kroker eds., *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987, pp. 82.

are dead. In Part 2 we will look at the alignment of death, fashion and femininity. The following sections (*Naming the Equation*, *Someday I'll Be a Famous Fashion Model: Dreaming of Death*, *Neiman Marcus' Heterotopia*, and *Anna Molinari: Blumarine*) will attempt to come to grips with the phenomena of death advertising. The first chapter, *Naming the Equation*, will be a broad based analysis of the concept of death in the construction of the fashion magazine. I have divided *Naming the Equation* into two separate "equations": the first, "Necessity and Snapshots," considers the relation between photography, language and death; the second, "Desire and Death," engages concepts of symbolic importance to the depiction of death in fashion magazines. Next we will consider the role of narrative and the *embodiment* of fashion's promised perfection in chapter two, *Someday I'll be a Famous Fashion Model*. Chapter three will operate as a counter-point to chapter two, inasmuch as it deals with the destruction of narrative through a heterotopic discourse of fashion. Here, my focus will be on Annie Leibowitz's *Art of Fashion* advertising spread for Neiman Marcus, built around actress Jennifer Jason Leigh, and its critique of the sought-after perfection of the frozen photographic moment. In the fourth section *Anna Molinari: Blumarine* I will delve into an analysis of the death affect in fashion advertising, specifically the 1995 advertisement for Anna Molinari: *Blumarine*, shot by Helmut Newton and featuring model Carré Otis.

These four analyses, although all interrogating different aspects of advertising (and more generally, representation) in the fashion magazine, will reveal an uneasy tension between self-reflexive (postmodern) criticism and the bold re-trenchment of the most dangerous and regressive of representational

texts: the dead [beautiful] female body. I will draw out both the pitfalls and promises of these critically positioned texts, not in the hopes of reaching a final or concrete decision, a critical epiphany. Rather, I aim to explore and, through exploration, open these texts to a broader critical, feminist discourse that engages the fashionable body. If it is true, as Gayatri Spivak remarks, that "...in the general discourse of the humanities, there is a sort of search for solutions, whereas in literary discourse [and I would contend art historical discourse] there is a playing out of the problem as the solution...",<sup>74</sup> then let us proceed to the problems and engage them as solutions.

## **Naming the Equation...**

### **Equation 1: Necessity and Snapshots**

As I mentioned in the introduction to Part One, I can never experience death and come back to tell about it; death is incommensurable with the concept of "telling". Nonetheless, death plays a major and defining role in the shaping of the way we live our lives - both psychically and practically. The presence of death permeates every culture of the world - every language has a word for death, but each one means something different. Thus the way we *live* death, so to speak, is defined by a complex nexus of our culture, religion, and language - we will all die, but it will come to each of us in infinitely different

<sup>74</sup>G. C. Spivak, 1987, pp. 77.

clothes. As Elisabeth Bronfen and Sarah Goodwin remark in the introduction to their book, *Death and Representation* (1993), "Death is...necessarily constructed by a culture: it grounds the many ways a culture stabilizes and represents itself, and yet it always does so with an incessantly receding, ungraspable signified, always pointing to other signifiers, other means of representing what finally is just absent."<sup>75</sup> In many ways, this assessment of death bears much in common with many assessments of fashion (see: Barthes 1981, Baudrillard 1990) as a series of constantly sliding and shifting signifiers built around our bodies; clothing covering our naked flesh, fashion metaphorizing the garment away from the viscerality of the corpse. Fashion, a notoriously *unstable* concept, constantly points away from itself toward a promised solidity somewhere in the perfect[ed] future.

Death can be said to be the only "real" limit to our lives - which is a truism to be sure. But, unlike many other truisms, death is a truism that is not known outside our witnessing; it can not be empirically experienced and named as "not life". Instinctually, however, we know that it is the end of one's functioning in the "life world", and thus we scurry to metaphorize its finality. Its bald closure, its blatant end, is intolerable to our hubristic dreams of immortality.<sup>76</sup> Our attempts to allay death matter not; our carefully constructed

<sup>75</sup>E. Bronfen and S. Goodwin, 1993, pp. 4.

<sup>76</sup> The sense of death is continually linked as a point of origin to concepts of philosophy. As Taylor and Saarinen remark in their 1994 book, *Imagologies: Media Philosophy*, "When you lose the sense of death, it is no longer necessary or possible to philosophize in traditional ways. Philosophy ends when death dies. The death of death is not disappearance but its forgetting. In simcult, death has receded into oblivion through the play of images, which, paradoxically, stages death's incessant arrival. In the absence of death, classical philosophy becomes impossible and thus it is necessary to invent new ways of philosophizing."

## **NOTE TO USERS**

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comprehensible.<sup>78</sup> Fashion, as is amply demonstrated in the fashion magazine, can only be fully realized in the static medium of photography; it is perfect, for an instant. Paradoxically, the point of plenitude and perfection is also the point of death. Immobilized in the shutter of the camera, fashion becomes comprehensible, the ever-shifting and slippery signifier has been stilled - if only until the next issue - the monologic sleight of hand.

It is fashion's stilled nature (*still life/nature morte*) that marks the most poignant site of death in the language of fashion. However, there is a fault in this presentation: fashion cannot be dead for, as a system of signifying, it is in constant use by its wearers. Thus, in much the same way as the Bakhtin Circle theorized language as a social and contextual practice, fashion as a signifying practice becomes dependant on the *contextual* for its meaning in relation to other members of our society. Voloshinov states, "Every sign...is a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction."<sup>79</sup> In the fashion magazine, fashion is extricated from its lived context and presented to us as a static system of poses and clothes - these glossy pages are the dissecting table of Saussure's formalism. Herein lies the

E. Saarinen and M. Taylor, *Imagologies: Media Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 'gaping 10'.

<sup>77</sup>R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1981, pp. 96.

key: it is the peculiarity of the fashion magazine, and its need to sell a clearly defined product for its continued existence, that it must kill the “ceaseless flow of becoming” to which signifying practices (such as fashion) are bound.<sup>80</sup> Through this killing, the lived reality of clothing is sacrificed to a stable and authoritative discourse free of the vagaries of day-to-day life.

## **Equation 2: Desire and Death**

It is not only signification that tends towards death. *Desire and sexuality*, as they are conceptualized within the Western episteme, operate to further enforce and solidify the equation between fashion and death. In her essay “Animal Sex,” Elisabeth Grosz, discusses the role played by the female praying mantis in the male psyche, as a means of interrogating the often problematic alignment of the feminine with *her sex*, and *her* deadly tendencies. The mantis is both signifier of potent *feminine* sexuality as well as voracious *killer* of her sexual partners.<sup>81</sup> We will see further play on the trope of ‘feminine all-consuming desire’ in my discussion of Anna Molinari: *Blumarine* below. However, by way of a primer, I believe it necessary to broach a discussion of this alignment of femininity/death/sex here, as it goes a long way to helping solidify the “tenacity of the link between desire and death” both in fashion and

(in Grosz's context) in sexuality.

The praying mantis -- much like the fashion model -- is considered to be a machine ("...a fucking machine") over-determined by an avaricious anthropomorphism that aligns its so-called "sexuality" with human qualities of death and insatiability. Thus determination, it could be argued, says more about our culture's view of the feminine than about the praying mantis. This problematic pairing is revealed in French sociologist, Roger Callois' discussion of the mantis-as-android:

Indeed the assimilation of the mantis into an automaton -- that is, in view of its anthropomorphism, to a female android -- seems to me to be a consequence of the same affective theme: the conception of an artificial, mechanical, inanimate, and unconscious *machine-woman* incommensurable with man and other living creatures derives from a particular way of envisioning the relation between love and death, and, more precisely, from an ambivalent premonition of finding one within the other...<sup>82</sup>

This 'killer-woman' is a litmus test for our culture's obsessive correlation of the terms woman, sex and death: "...by linking sexual pleasure to the concept of death and dying, by making sex something to die for, something that is a kind of anticipation of death (the "little death"), woman is thereby cast into the category off the non-human, the non-living, or a living threat of death."<sup>83</sup>

I believe that we can here see the difficult over-flow of signification that rests upon the shoulders of *Woman* and how these significations are both bolstered and complicated by the fashion magazine. For fashion's tendency

toward temporary stasis (death) is compounded by the model's machine-like status which draws her into the realm of the non-living. It is this double-coding that would seemingly lock the fashion magazine and its models into a stylized mausoleum: the magazine and the medium of photography creating a freeze-framed tableau of frozen perfection, the model-machine as harbinger of death - her perfection being both a sign of her power and her unattainability - and language ossified into its most abstract formal (non-living) sense. It is in this locked space where we are forced, upon reflection, to question why fashion magazines manage to maintain such a tenacious grip on a large portion of the public if they constantly present us with culturally coded scenes of death? Why do fashion magazines, despite this morbidity, act as a popular site of both cultural imagining and ways of being?

Unfortunately, the key to/out of this lock/ed space is no answer, for it opens upon new chambers, no more revealing than the one from which we will have secured escape. The key is marked as *desire*, and it will lead us from room to room as we revolve around the central chamber (death) in a Sartre-like search for revelation.<sup>84</sup> Desire - the desire for the dream of fashion - refuses to do away with the object of desire (the deadly still image), to have done with this journey from room to room (page to page), for perfection *beckons*. "[Desire]...no longer functions according to an "intentional arc," according to the structures of signification, meaning, pattern or purpose;...desire fragments and dissolves the unity and utility of the organic body and the stabilized body-

image."<sup>85</sup> To desire the image is to not rationally know the image, but to respond to it as a wanted [needed] site of fulfilment. However, we can never arrive at this point, for it eludes our grip in its transiency, and the closer we come to that dreamed-of point, the more clearly the death affect is defined. Eros and Thanatos have caught us in a revolving door - running from the deathly disarray of Thanatos to the perfection of Eros; arriving at Eros only to realize his unattainability and our mortality.

We can see that the overflow *is* the paradox. The fashion image, the model, frozen of necessity, becomes something other. She, because doubly coded as *dead* and female, becomes self-reflexive: overinvested with the resplendent signs of fashion, her body is meant to be the site of fullness, but as we draw in, the still and unreal aspect of photographed fashion denies our access to all that was promised. This duality both stabilizes (through maintenance of desire and promise of perfection) and destabilizes (because the fashion magazine, as a closed system, can never be accessed in the real) the viewer's position in relation to fashion -- fashion as Freud's *civilization*, wrapping us in immortality, shield to the fatefulness of the (deadly) real.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup>E. Grosz, 1995, pp. 195. For further reading on the concepts of desire and the structuring of the body, refer to A. Lingus, *Libido*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1985; and M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, J. M. Edie (ed.), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963.

<sup>86</sup>"Civilization does not test, but realizes our fantasies; it does not put us in touch with Fate (the real), but protects us from it. The social subject is thus pictured as "a kind of prosthetic God," whose fantasmatic, artificial limbs substitute for the inferior, natural ones Fate bestows. Civilization endows the subject with a fantasmatic body and fairytalelike powers." J. Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994, pp. 40. See also, S. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (SE)*, vol. 21, pp. 92.

Clothing, like language, cannot be stopped and turned into a static display without killing it or turning it into something *other* than fashion: "Clothes are so much a part of our living, moving selves that, frozen on display in the mausoleums of culture, they hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening; the atrophy of the body, and the evanescence of life."<sup>87</sup> In the taking of a snapshot we will inevitably feel the chill of Barthes' *anterior future* death of this (fashion), the language of clothing.

<sup>87</sup>The Fashion Project: <http://www.ucet.ufl.edu/~tcox/suit.htm>

## Dreaming's Fashionable Death Fathomed.

*She lies there dreaming, as I have done, of being a fashion model. Clothes, drugs, fans, throngs of photographers clamouring for a picture of you: you in your perfect elegance, your frozen hair, your wrinkle free skirts...<sup>88</sup>*

Neiman Marcus, an American department store, began a series of advertisements in 1995 entitled, *The Art of Fashion*. These advertisements usually span twelve to fourteen pages and serve to highlight the coming season's fashions. Of the three series that have been presented in *Harper's Bazaar*, two have - in my estimation - chosen to take a very critical stand toward the fashion industry's production of beauty. In "Some Day I'll Be A Famous Fashion Model And Wear Beautiful Clothes..." photographed by Geof Kern<sup>89</sup> (September 1995) -- the more recent of the two to be studied herein -- we see a model moving somnambulistically through the steps of being a super-model. Her dream, however, becomes a nightmare as her fame as a super-model quickly sours and becomes an inexorable journey toward her death in the form of a mannequin.<sup>90</sup> This fourteen page spread bears much in common with an earlier (March 1995) Neiman Marcus advertisement featuring Jennifer

<sup>88</sup>A. Elvish. *Untitled Notebook*, 1995, pp. 10.

<sup>89</sup>The work of Geof Kern has traditionally been associated with photo-montage images such as can be seen in his work for recording artist Suzanne Vega (1991 - *Days of Open Hand*), but he has recently expanded into fashion photography. His work tends toward static *tableaux* clearly evident in both his work for Neiman Marcus and his photos for *San Fransisco Magazine* ("Puttin' on the Ritz" - no date).

<sup>90</sup>Interestingly, her dreams of becoming a supermodel in real-life have not yet materialized. In a recent telephone conversation (March 3, 1997) with the advertising executive of Neiman Marcus, I asked the name of the model in the photo, and was told that she was 'nobody', a "random model."

Jason Leigh (to be discussed in chapter three) inasmuch as it attempts a critique of the fashion system by showing the unreality of the dream of *perfection* in fashion. Whereas the advertisement featuring Jennifer Jason Leigh attempts to show the disparity between beautiful clothing and happiness by showing her body as uncomfortable in scene after beautiful scene, advertisement shows the natural or *naturalized* outcome of a narrative that assumes being a beautiful fashion model is desirable. The model loses control of her environment to the point of absolute loss: she becomes a doll to be dressed and posed, standing, frozen, in the window of a curio shop.

Narrative is linked to sexuality, especially the feminine. The *narrative drive*, as described by Laura Mulvey, is linked to the mystery of sexual difference and a desire to patrol the limits of this difference:

Curiosity describes a desire to know something secret so strongly that it is experienced as a drive. It is a source of danger and pleasure and knowledge...In the myths of Eve and Pandora, curiosity lay behind the first woman's desire to penetrate a forbidden secret that precipitated the fall of man. These myths associate female curiosity with an active narrative function.<sup>91</sup>

"Someday I'll be a Famous Fashion Model..." is a contemporary morality tale that points to the damaging unreality of the fashion system while, paradoxically, furthering that unreality. What we are presented with is a story of clothing saturating the model and spreading its fetishistic power through her. As Karl Marx has pointed out, when goods are produced for exchange in the market they come to be seen not only as articles of utility ('use values') but

<sup>91</sup>L. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: MacMillan, 1989, pp. x. Cited in L. Curti "What is Real and What is Not: Female Fabulations in Cultural Analysis," *Cultural Studies*, eds. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. Treichler, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 142.



also as inherently valuable objects with special 'mystical' qualities.<sup>92</sup>

In the case of "Someday I'll be a Famous Fashion Model..." the mystical properties of clothing solidify the model into a blatant representation of that which remains unspoken in the traditional fashion advertisement - *perfection in death*. This series of photographs enacts Georg Lukacs's concept of *reification*<sup>93</sup> in its most dramatic form -- a theoretical formulation in which the human becomes the abstraction *fashion* through *her* relation to the fetish of clothing. Thus, to Lukacs' concept of reification and Marx's commodity fetishism<sup>94</sup>, we add rigor mortis. To quote Leslie Rabine:

Fashion photography, which depends on this reified status of woman, produces an image that denies its premise, and through the derealizing yet super-real effect of photography, projects to feminine viewers the sense of invulnerability and exuberant feminine sexual power that they can dramatize through their bodies.<sup>95</sup>

In this "dramatization" of the body, it is the body's unpredictability which must be killed, so that the body can become a unified plane upon which the narrative of fashion can be projected.

<sup>92</sup>L. Gamman and M. Makinen, 1994, pp. 28.

<sup>93</sup>Lukacs writes, "The transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of 'ghostly objectivity' cannot therefore content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his *qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can 'own' or 'dispose of' like the various objects of the external world*. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic 'qualities' into play without their being subjected to increasingly to this reifying process." G. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, London: Merlin Press, 1971 (originally published as *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* Berlin: Malik 1923). Emphasis added.

<sup>94</sup>Michael Taussig writes that commodity fetishism involves, "...the attribution of life, autonomy, power and even dominance to otherwise inanimate objects and presupposes the draining of these qualities from the human actors who bestow the attribution." L. Gamman and M. Makinen, 1994, pp. 29.

<sup>95</sup>L. Rabine, "A Woman's Two Bodies," *On Fashion*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994, p. 66.

**Sleep.** The story begins with the face of a woman who is, presumably, in bed dreaming of becoming a fashion model. We then follow her, in the first two pages as she, with wide-eyed disbelief, floats out of her bedroom<sup>96</sup> (figure 2) and flies through the night air (figure 3). However, her newfound freedom is undermined; for as she exalts in the garden (figure 4) we can see the menacing undercurrents of the story embodied in the gardener who seems posed to lunge at our ill-fated heroine with his garden shears (figure 5).

**Home.** Extricating herself from this situation, she flies into the jaws of domesticity. In figure 7 she is faced with a troupe of men seemingly out of a Magritte painting presenting her with the accoutrements of domesticity - which she is seemingly obliged to accept due to the structural vanishing point of the house's entryway. For the next four shots we see her move through a surreal collage of the house wife, mother, and woman-about-town; vacuuming the lawn, meeting the mayor and leading a troupe of school boys. In figure 12 we come to know the dangerous game that is being played as the heroine stands in a cemetery, dressed totally in black, she is being *watched* by a man - death beckons.

**Fear.** In the last half of this series the landscape begins to lose its proportions. Whereas earlier, she had the ability to move unhindered in the landscape, albeit in an extraordinarily posed manner (figures 14, 15, 16, 17),

<sup>96</sup>Cynthia Hammond remarks, "This model, furthermore, is captive in either sense of a state of powerlessness/confinement, or being captivated/enraptured. Her wide-eyed expression denotes a wholesale capitulation to her condition..." C. Hammond, *The Strength and Fragility of the Egg: Spring Hurlbut's Interventions in the Classical Idiom*, Master's Thesis in the Department of Art History, Concordia University, Montréal, pp. 64.

she has now grown disproportionately large, while fear and worry spread over her face for the first time. She wanders, her stature disallowing her access to any buildings - even her own home. She eventually shrinks back to her normal size and is now stranded in the middle of the street over which she once towered. Passer-bys notice her and crowd about her (figure 20). They are accusing her (figure 21), but of what? Has she overstepped a boundary? Has she said the wrong thing - is she asking for *it*? Perhaps her fault lies in the fact that she is (once again) the same as them. Yet this sameness can never be, for she is still, evidently, a super-model and *humanity* is incompatible with the expectations our culture holds for those installed in the firmament of "the beautiful". Is she being accused of being a human? Have expectations been shattered?

**Retribution.** Black trench-coated mannequins punctuate the street (figure 22); the man in figure 12 is called to mind. (Is her time up?) Although she affects a pose of aggression and strength, she is nonetheless descended upon by these black-clad men -- surrounded by these menacing male-mannequins (figure 23). Now, in an ominous alley (figure 24) she is given jewels from an older man (the father?); she takes jewels from a box (the spoils of glamour?), but upon doing so she realizes her fate -- a trash can is overturned. She is caught in a scream (figure 25): she will never awake.

**Frozen.** In the last three scenes (figures 26 - 28), the heroine becomes a mannequin. Immobilized, her body is conveyed by men toward a lorry (figures 26 and 27). In the end she is on display -- a part of the spectacle of

the city -- in the Dudley-Brooks Curio Shop. She does not awake from her dream, for she is now the abstraction *fashion* embodied in the form of the super-model, a perfection which is [explicitly] coterminous with *death*.

Jurij Lotman's theory of plot typology seems an especially poignant addition to the foregoing narrative. He states that a text contains two characters: one a mobile heroine whose movement through plot/space establishes differences and norms, and the other an immobile obstacle or boundary, representing a function of this space. This second space can, according to Lotman, be interpreted as a grave, cave, house or woman, with the corresponding features of darkness, warmth and dampness. Entry into this space can be interpreted as death, conception, return home, and "all of these acts are thought of as mutually identical."<sup>97</sup>

In this narrative structure the woman/heroine is made blatantly immobile, posed in (as) the landscape. The diegesis presents Lukacs' concept of reification as an immobilizing (and dehumanizing) process ending in death. Teresa deLauretis discusses the alignment of the "obstacle" with the feminine as being due to the fact that the feminine "...is always identified with the inanimate, immobile space which, functioning as a boundary, cannot constitute itself as a heroine/subject. As such it does not have its own meaning but rather produces meaning for another." [Teresa DeLauretis cited in Bronfen p. 50] In a very clear manoeuvre this advertisement shows the over-determination of the *feminine* within the narrative structure of the fashion magazine. Clearly

<sup>97</sup> T. deLauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Cited in Elisabeth Bronfen, 1991, pp. 50. See also, Jurij Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1976.

mocking and playing with the tradition (as pointed out by deLauretis) of the model as sign, this advertisement points to the fine line between displaying *one's own* fashion [sense] and turning into a figure to be manipulated -- displaying *his* fashion.

In the concluding shots of this series she is taken, by male mannequins, to make a choice (already made for her?). After accepting 'jewels' from the 'father' we see her scream - her last mortal act. However, we never see her *die*, or at least not death as we "know" it. Indeed, it is less a death than a rigidification -- eradicating agency through the elimination of movement. She is now the mythical phallus, her genitals sealed with fibreglass<sup>98</sup> (interestingly, in fig 1.26 she is positioned at the level of the moving man's crotch - her head erect, her body stiff...), her fearsome sexuality stayed.<sup>99</sup> Now our model (as for all models, it is intimated) must display the clothes to the camera, not as a human but as a corpse -- made as rigid as fibre-glass and as beautiful as a mannequin -- for it is only on a surface evacuated of life that the fashion

<sup>98</sup> States Kaja Silverman, "The oft repeated Lacanian assertion that woman *is* the phallus whereas man has the phallus dramatizes the profound ambiguities of the last term. In so far as woman's body is understood as escaping symbolic structuration, she can be described as being the phallus but not having it (ie. as existing within the real, but being cut off from cultural privilege.) "Histoire d'O: The Construction of a Female Subject." in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 322.

<sup>99</sup> Sarah Koffman remarks, "'Woman's deathlike rigidity,' [*psychische Starrheit*] implies the desire to put an end to the enigmatic and ungraspable nature of Woman, to the perpetual shift between masculinity and femininity.", from, *The Enigma of Woman. Woman in Freud's Writing*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. Cited in Bronfen, 1992, pp. 269. This concept is further elaborated in the work of Leslie Rabine (1994), who states: "...this photograph, like innumerable others resolves the threat to men's castration posed by the woman's lack of phallus and her indifference to this lack, and resolves as well the maddening unpredictability that fetishism triggers, by making woman into the phallus. The photograph still expresses a culture in which man thus gives himself the illusion of possessing the phallus through the illusion that he possesses the woman." pp. 73.

narrative (as a stable sign system) can operate.

Fashion will work its magic over our bodies, where words fail us, and bridge the lacunae of death and decay, allowing us to travel for a moment to that other side where death *is* perfection where we can relish "...[the corpse's] beauty [which] marks the purification and distance from two moments of insecurity - female sexuality and decay." [Bronfen, 1991, p. 11] Thus, this narrative stabilizes the model's death. She is, in a perverse way, resurrected by her beauty - death/decay is transferred on to a "stable" signifier: the fashionable mannequin. Her body becomes the ultimate site of fashion by turning wholly into the *sign* fashion, through death. An invisible and occluded death, a death of solidification, the commodity made flesh, made fibreglass.

## Neiman Marcus: The Anti-dream Heterotopia

**Utopias** afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold: they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy even though the road to them is chimerical. **Heterotopias** are disturbing, probably because they undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter and tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula; heterotopias desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.<sup>100</sup>

Fashion promises a utopia and produces the desire for this utopia through the use of the tools of the heterotopia.<sup>101</sup> In the utopia everyone *looks* fabulous: the hair and nails are perfect, the makeup is exquisite and the clothes are always couture. In ardent and earnest tones we are assured, as readers of the fashion magazine, that this too can be ours. The dream of the perfect look, it is promised (and hoped for), can be found on the next page, in the next issue, the next season -- tomorrow in the store, but never here, and never now. The frozen perfection of fashion (in the magazine, on the runway) makes us these promises, only to be realized at a later date - another instant - when it is no longer *now*, when the fullness of the moment has passed. In this

<sup>100</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Tavistock, 1970, pp. xviii.

<sup>101</sup>Juila Emberly, "The Fashion Apparatus and the Deconstruction of Postmodern Subjectivity," Arthur and Marilouise Kroker eds., *Body Invaders: Panic Sex In America*, New York, 1987, pp. 52 -53.

section I will use the topos of heterotopia to frame my discussion of "The Art of Fashion" (*Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995, 12 pp., 30 separate images). I will explore the constant deferral of the signifier fashion and how this deferral leads to a perpetually restless body; one which can never find [fashionable] respite because of a constantly receding and ever-changing signification of the word fashion.

The photographer of this lay-out, the renowned Annie Leibowitz<sup>102</sup> (1949, USA), does not engage a straight-forward narrative style (as we have seen in Neiman Marcus' later advertising spread, "Someday I'll be a Famous Fashion Model and Wear Beautiful Clothes...") but rather avoids the familiarity of the morality tale, and opts instead to move in closely on the model's (actress Jennifer Jason Leigh) schizophrenic journey through a land seemingly evacuated of the "human". We are presented with a pockmarked and bound image of a psychotic (though fashionable) desert. The power of these photos lies in their disruption of the fashion signifier: the body and the clothing seem to balk at each other; fashion's promise of identity and ease of living is revealed to be not only a mirage but a deadly charade.

Leibowitz photographs Jennifer Jason Leigh<sup>103</sup> as she moves

<sup>102</sup> Annie Leibowitz began as a photographer for *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1970, and became its chief photographer in 1973. She has been the contributing photographer for *Vanity Fair* since 1983. Her major exhibitions include, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York; The Mary Boone Gallery, New York; and *Annie Leibowitz Photographs 1970-1990*, National Portrait Gallery, London and European tour 1994. For further reading, see: E. Cooper, *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography*, London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>103</sup> Jennifer Jason Leigh is an apt choice for this advertisement when one considers her career in film. Leigh is well known for her roles as an emotionally unstable "woman on the edge", or as critic Rex Murphy terms it, her roles are mainly of "sluts and nuts." (<http://www.fashionmall.com>) Leigh's oeuvre includes such edgy and dark films as, *Last Exit to*



mechanically through pose after pose, each time colonizing a new identity, but ostensibly finding none that fit. In this advertisement, the photos follow a rough progression that draws the viewer into the “model’s” life, follows her through an uneasy foray into the fashionable world of expensive houses and clothes, and finally withdraws from the model, leaving her alone (stranded) in a desert. Although the photos do not have a narrative structure, there are certain points of revelation that occur throughout. For instance, when one compares the first photo of Leigh (figure 29), a tight close-up that focuses on the model’s engaging eyes and little else, to the last photo, a wide-angle shot of the model, curled up and alone in a desert, her facial expression the same as the first shot, one gets a sense of Leibowitz’s project: a commentary on the vacuousness of fashion as a supposed site of fulfilment and wholeness (intactness). Indeed, in the middle two pages of this advertisement (figures 40-41), which feature four photos to a page, Leibowitz is at pains to illustrate the ‘prosthetics’ of the fashion photograph. In these eight photos, the backdrops, reflectors, and stand-weights all attest to a high degree of construction. This construction/artifice is shown by Leibowitz to be ineffective in fully transforming nature (as it is dwarfed by the vastness of the desert landscape) or in providing a sense of stability (the backdrops are buffeted and wrinkled by the winds) from the unpredictability of weather. The lack of narrativity, it could be argued, is in itself a very clear form of narrative, inasmuch as it narrates a

*Brooklyn* (1989), *Rush* (1991), *Single White Female* (1992), *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle* (1994), *Dolores Claiborne* (1995), and *Georgia* (1995). In one short biography, Leigh is described as having put “...herself through more scenes of humiliation and degradation than most actors rack up in a lifetime [which] helped her cement her reputation as Hollywood’s *dark shadow*.” (<http://www.altculture.com/site/entries/jenxleigh.html>) For further reading on Jennifer Jason Leigh refer to: [http://www.premieremag.com/featpres/Feb\\_96/jjleigh/jjleigh2.html](http://www.premieremag.com/featpres/Feb_96/jjleigh/jjleigh2.html)

series of interchangeable poses that follow in rapid succession without a sensible order, without a discernable plot: narrating the dislocation of fashionable (utopian) grammar in a deserted (heterotopian) world.

Fashion's presentation of the "style of immortality, a brand new lifestyle where nothing decays or gets old, masking death, waste, poverty and absence,"<sup>104</sup> is here transgressed. Leibowitz has worked to create a world that is dysfunctional, quiet, and very troubling. Unlike the solidification that occurs in the "Someday I'll be a Famous Fashion Model..." advertisement, this advertisement works to reveal the insupportable *lack* that clothing promises to cover-over -- solidity is forsaken for restlessness. Whereas in chapter two we witnessed perfection in death, we here witness disjunction in living. There is no dreamed of point of perfection, no telos that would provide closure, even that of death. This series reveals something even more troubling than the eventual rigor mortis of the "famous fashion model": the emotional and psychological homelessness of the "woman of fashion." The utopia, even if hardened into the figure of a mannequin, is here impossible because narrative has been destroyed. All that remains is the [im]perfected language of fashion, language which will communicate to the 'speaker' nothing more than a desire to change clothes - in search of the perfect moment when clothing, mind, body and space will come together and form a *habitus*.<sup>105</sup> But, as this section will

<sup>104</sup>Julia Emberly, 1987, p. 59.

<sup>105</sup> States John Fiske, "The concept of "habitus" contains the meaning of habitat, habitant, the process of habitation and habit. A habitat is a social environment in which we live: it is a product of both its position in the social space and of the practices of the social beings who inhabit it." In, J. Fiske "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life," *Cultural Studies*, L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler (eds.), London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 155. For

show, Leigh will never arrive at that sought after space (the home) because of the incommensurability of the (fashionable) utopia with unpredictable heterotopos of the body.

The optical operation of the fashion system is one which relies on our inability to see the speed at which fashion travels. To explain: fashion, much like film, cannot be slowed down, scrutinized frame-by-frame, without losing its magic, without becoming non-sensical. Annie Leibowitz slows the speed of optical operation, revealing the subtle ticks, gaps, and over-acted moments of the fashionable actress: the model. Leibowitz does not provide us with fashion's traditional "unitary effect of congenial pluralities that apparently 'hold-together' without contradictions."<sup>106</sup> We become aware that the "congeniality" of fashion's "pluralities" has fallen by the way-side in this "de-accelerated" version. Our focus is drawn singly to the disaffected and ill-at-ease body of Leigh; we are witness to her dissatisfaction with the promised plentitude of fashion unfulfilled.

Walter Benjamin described Eugène Atget's (1808-1889) photographs as ones which "...disinfected the sticky atmosphere spread by conventional...photography in that period of decline. He cleansed this atmosphere, he cleared it...He sought the forgotten and the neglected, so such pictures turn reality against the exotic, romantic, show offish resonance...they

further reading on the concept of the *habitus* see Pierre Bordieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

<sup>106</sup>J. Fiske, 1992, pp. 155.

suck the aura from reality like water from a sinking ship."<sup>107</sup> Unlike Atget, Leibowitz exploits the emptiness of the scenes she depicts to instill the model with an uneasy mixture of the alien body and the schizophrenic in the land of fashion.

Leigh, wearing a silver mask and a red Herve Léger dress (figure 31), stands alone in a wide open space: there is something that unsettles the viewer, a point in the picture that *wounds* the eye. Beyond the camera, what is it that causes Leigh to cover her genitals and efface her identity (with a mask)? Leigh is "...not lonely but voiceless...[these pictures are] swept clean...establishing a healthy alienation between environment and man, opening the field for a politically educated sight, in the face of which all intimacies fall in favour of the illumination of the details."<sup>108</sup> As Benjamin would have termed them, these pictures represent a "crime scene": deserted, this photo becomes a search for evidence -- "evidence for historical occurrences...a hidden political significance."<sup>109</sup> Have I (the reader) been indicted in this crime? For, it is my gaze, floating though the hazed and airbrushed beauty of the fashion magazine that has stopped so abruptly on this series of photographs (specifically this image), my eyes that take up the role of external, mobile (male?) viewer: the

<sup>107</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Walter Benjamin's Short History of Photography," trans. Phil Patton, *Artforum* vol. 15, no. 6, February 1977, p. 58.

<sup>108</sup>This is described in Benjamin's "Short History of Photography" as Atget's empty photos which are "not lonely but voiceless...[these pictures are]swept clean...establishing a healthy alienation between environment and man, opening the field for a politically educated sight, in the face of which all intimacies fall in favour of the illumination of the details."

<sup>109</sup> W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 226.

eye (l) that colonizes that exterior space just beyond the camera lens.<sup>110</sup>

Or does this photo illustrate the “flat death” spoken of by Barthes? Leigh’s eyes, effaced by the mask, are black holes that engage the viewer in a blank stare, without affect, without feeling; they point to more than the abundance of fashion can say. A deathly body, photographed, spoken of:

...nothing to say about death of one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph, which I contemplate without ever being able to get to the heart of it, to transform it...at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two nothing more than waiting; I have no other resource than this irony...<sup>111</sup>

Whereas Bathes saw the photograph to be the ‘defeat of time’, Leibowitz demonstrates that time *never* matters: in the supra-abundant landscape of the fashion image there is nothing to lose because, ironically, there is nothing to gain. Leigh has become a fleshy automaton who will never find her desired object (death - closure) because she has been saturated with it.

This ‘saturation’ highlights the extreme disparity between fashion signifiers and signifieds. The body of woman in the fashion heterotopia is portrayed to be in an impossible position; the unity of the fashion sign is striven for but is clearly unattainable. Plentitude in perfection is purchased at the cost of living: by paying this price you lose the very thing (living) to which you would have applied the object of desire (perfection). My earlier use of the word schizophrenic was not mere stylistic hyperbole; rather it was used to

<sup>110</sup>Lacan in his book, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* (trans. Alan Sheridan, 1978) discusses the phenomenon of the gaze as it operates in photography, he states, “...in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture...what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside...” Cited in Kaja Silverman, “Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,” 1986, p. 187.

<sup>111</sup> R. Barthes, 1981, pp. 93.

emphasize the radical disparity between subjects and their "desired objects."<sup>112</sup> Lacan describes the concept of the alienated desire as being founded on lack: "...a desire that can never be satisfied, the product of a self who is not self-identical, but rather split, constructed in difference...the irreducibility of the resistance that marks the constitution of both signification and the subject."<sup>113</sup> Leibowitz makes a spectacle of the fashion model as self-identified and whole through her use of the uneasy body of Leigh. She points to the misrecognition, the forgery of the centred and autonomous subject of the fashion photograph. Leigh becomes a 'model' instead for "...the subject founded on radical alterity, an otherness within, which makes the subject ex-centric to itself...."<sup>114</sup>

One is initially led to believe that these photos are a part of fashion's traditional 'utopia.' However, as the viewer moves closer it becomes clear that there has been a shift. The "Art of Fashion" is a warped reflection of its former (utopic) self. This disrupted mirror image, because of cracks and distortion, reveals the discrepancies between signifier and referent, between the self-identical fashion model and the 'reality' of the human subject. This mirror, rather than presenting us with the perfect/future image of our [fashionable] selves, reflects back at us a troubling dislocation of beauty that can never be realized.

You, the reader, may ask how this analysis feeds into a discussion of

<sup>112</sup>Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, 1993, p. 156.

<sup>113</sup>ibid..

<sup>114</sup>ibid., p. 158.

death within fashion photography. Although not as blatant or didactic as either the foregoing or the following examples, Leibowitz's photoshoot presents a commentary on (rather than a depiction of) death and inertia in the fashion/able world. Through the series of photographs it becomes evident that Leigh will never stop posing, never stop restlessly shifting from one fashionable locale to another. One becomes aware that Leibowitz is concerned to present the fashionable body - living through and for fashion - as that which will never escape the *lifeless* flux and change that marks the very essence of fashion. *She* (the model) is the pawn of a discourse that cannot live.

To return to the earlier metaphor of the movie, I discussed the concept of the "optical operation" which takes place in a film, that is the coming together of a number of frames to make a coherent movement. Let us re-examine the "operation", for it is Leibowitz's subversion of this fluidity that reveals the affect of death in this series of photographs. Benjamin discusses the seismic shift that film has wrought upon the daily life of the spectator, explaining:

Then came film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruin and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling...The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals *entirely new structural formations of the subject*.<sup>115</sup>

However, in these new formulations, Benjamin could never have known how deeply the culture of the reproduction would permeate our daily lives in the postmodern.

Thus, for contemporary man, the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers,

115 W. Benjamin, 1968, pp. 236. Emphasis added.

precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 234)

The next logical step from the foregoing quote would be that "the modern man" would no longer understand where the [invisibly] technologized reproduction of reality ends and the technologically orchestrated *lifestyle* begins.<sup>116</sup> The more we are encouraged by the ever proliferating culture of images to both insert and live our lives in the modalities of the fashionable image, the more we lose sight of the operation that is being performed upon our bodies.

The "optical operation" is presided over by the filmmaker/surgeon ("the imagemaker" might be more *à propos* today), who is able to communicate in a substantially more "significant" manner through "...[diminishing] the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body." (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 233) Thus, our image comprehension is sutured to the flickering media world, binding us, theoretically, to its (increasingly capitalist) *vision* of the world. To slow down the film strip of *lifestyle*, means to strike at the very heart of image culture, to strike at the very part of the image-apparatus that makes its operations invisible to us (me) the consumer(s).

Death comes to us in Neiman Marcus' heterotopia not as *telos* (solidification: seen in "Some Day I'll Be a Famous Fashion Model) or as violent death (murder: seen in the following section on Anna Molinari's *Blumarine*

<sup>116</sup> States Baudrillard, "...the fourth stage, which I will call the fractal stage, or also, the viral stage, or still, the irradiated state of value, there is no longer a referent at all. The value irradiates in all directions, filling in all interstices, without bearing reference to anything whatsoever except by way of mere continuity." *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, pp. 52.



advertisement) but as entropy. Baudrillard remarks in his book, *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities* (1983):

Information dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy.<sup>117</sup>

This entropy, this inert uniformity, is shown by Leibowitz to be endemic in the world of images. By drawing her camera back far enough that one can see the physical support, by way of the photographer's backdrops and props (the surgeon's "tools": figs. 40-41), the viewer becomes aware of the 'constructedness' of the image. However, the construction is unsound: the backdrops blows in the wind, and could never have covered the vastness of nature anyway, but that deters neither the photographer nor the affect-less 'model'. The inert uniformity that characterizes entropy spreads itself indifferently over these pages; the eye of the camera, omnipotent in its gaze, asks not for innovation but for a continual stream of poses.

Finally, it could be said that Jennifer Jason Leigh's "life" in these photographs is a trick of editing: by posing and reposing the half-dead body of Leigh, the affect of "living" is achieved. But it is the tools of the utopia, tools which imbue the model's body with an abundance of life (permitting fables and discourses) that are forsaken in this advertisement. Leibowitz shows the practice of fashion photography to be a necrophilic practice. As Carol Christ states, "The artist in this way implicates his [sic] own artistic mode in this stilling of life, as if he [sic], a lover of corpses, depends for his art on a deadly

<sup>117</sup> J. Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, pp. 100.

Orphic gaze.”<sup>118</sup> Therefore, no closure is achieved, for the heterotopia disallows fables. Nonetheless, I believe that one can see the dangerous game that this advertisement reveals: the fashionable life - lived through constant spectacle - is dependant on relocating the heterotopic self into the utopic space of the image-world. This relocation depends on rendering ourselves as living spectacles; we become objects of contemplation for ourselves -- dying to be seen: “[Mankind’s] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.” (W. Benjamin, 1968, pp. 242) “YOU are news, you are the social, the event is you, you are involved...”<sup>119</sup> Or, as [anti]-protagonist Suzanne Stone remarks in Gus Van Sant’s 1995 movie *To Die For*: “You’re not anybody in America if you’re not on TV.” The lens of future/perfect fashion will present a prosthetic utopia as a means of covering the imperfect self (alienated/dislocated) in Neiman Marcus’ heterotopia.

<sup>118</sup> C. Christ, “Painting the Dead: Poetry and Necrophilia in Victorian Art and Poetry,” in *Death and Representation*, E. Bronfen and S. Goodwin (eds.), Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 138.

<sup>119</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 1983, pp. 53.

# Anna Molinari: Blumarine

The sense of some new sexual power  
Unknown to all her being till that hour  
Within it kindled a superb surprise.  
Back with half-open'd lips and half-shut eyes,  
She lean'd to its rich load her jewell'd head...<sup>120</sup>

"The post orgy state of things" is what Baudrillard has termed this present epoch, with the only territory left to explore being refuse, cultural effluent and bodily excess. The gap between signifier and signified has widened to such an extent that we comb through the vast array of signifiers at our disposal, looking for meaning in a sign system seemingly devoid of a referent. Modernity and the "era of production" were controlled by the industrial bourgeoisie and a stable sign system of producer/capital/consumer kept culture rolling along. However, we are now in "...the postmodern era of simulations...an era of information and signs governed by models, codes, and cybernetics."<sup>121</sup> In this era, the real shifts gears and becomes what Baudrillard describes as the hyperreal -- the point at which the distinction between the real and the *unreal* blur and the unreal becomes more real than that which it represents. The real is no longer a given.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> O. Meredith, *After Paradise, or Legends of Exile*, Boston, 1887. Cited in B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siecle Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 365.

<sup>121</sup> S. Best and D. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, New York: The Guilford Press 1991, pp. 118.

<sup>122</sup> I use the work of Baudrillard with more than a little trepidation. His work has recently come under attack for its race and class blindness in relation to "postmodernity". As Steven Best and Douglas Kellner remark, "...Baudrillard's erasure of the fundamentality of sexual

As we watch TV, shop for groceries, read a magazine, or use the telephone, our perception is filtered through a model that mediates the concept of *real*.<sup>123</sup> In the *semiurgic* society it is the sign that takes on a new life free of its link to the real. In the post-modern world "...social order [is] structured by models, codes, and signs"<sup>124</sup> which, in turn, structure reality into poses and codes of promised perfection -- an untenable perfection, unless the unpredictability of the real is imploded into the multiplicity of the signified. However, it is the loss of the affect of the real in the media-scape that makes us yearn for bodies, obsess over bodies, desire bodies. In their book *Imagologies : Media Philosophy* (1994) Mark Taylor and Esa Saarinen remark that,

The culture of the simulacrum is, paradoxically, both an "anorexic culture" and a "culture of the body." As the real disappears into the hyperreal, the body becomes an obsessive preoccupation. Never has the concern with body image been greater. Concentration on the body can lead either to its excessive denial or its excessive affirmation...As the materiality of experience vanishes, the need to reaffirm it grows intense. (M. Taylor and E. Saarinen, 1994, pp. *Body Snatchers* 8)

Within the *Blumarine* ad, photographed by Helmut Newton, we experience vicariously the most visceral and *real* of all events - death - while at the same time being continually reminded that our horror at the scene is

and racial differences is highly insensitive and even grotesque...[his] current positions are profoundly superficial and are characterized by sloppy generalizations, extreme abstraction, semiological idealism and oft repeated banalities..."(1991, pp. 139). My use of Baudrillard is less as a methodological touch-stone and more in line with an on-site agent, who is able to cogently theorize very specific media phenomenon at the end of the century. His work on the fractal economy, the post-orgy scene and hyperreality, are extremely valuable to the understanding of fashion in this period. To not use these concepts would not only lessen the impact of the overall argument but turn a blind eye to an important (though controversial) theorist at the fin de millennia.

123 J. Baudrillard, *In the Shadows of the Silent Majorities*, 1983, pp. 23.

124 Best and Kellner, 1991, pp. 118.

*mediated* and perfected by the model/code of the “fashionable”. It is this game of juxtaposing “real” death with the perfecting and reassuring gloss of the fashion magazine that draws Anna Molinari’s<sup>125</sup> *Blumarine* advertisement into the realm of the critical. That which first strikes me as a horrifically brutal way to sell clothes deepens, upon reflection, into an advertisement that strives to make equivalences, comparisons and critiques of the very magazine within which it is printed. Gayatri Spivak has remarked that “You can only read against the grain if misfits in the text signal the way.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, let us move into these last analyses of this thesis looking for *misfits*, for the areas where the text says more than it is supposed to (or, does not say enough), where its gratuity points to something besides (beyond) the clothes the model wears.

125 “The company’s creative mind is Anna Molinari. Anna Molinari’s vision of fashion is a mix of sensation and cultural influences, revisiting the past while divining the future for a romantic and glamorous woman, like Anna Molinari herself. Currently the company numbers over 700 outlets, 400 of which are located in Italy. It exports for about 40% of its whole output.” More information can be obtained on Anna Molinari at: <http://www.moda.italy.net.com/stilisti/molinari/e/imagine.htm/>

126 G. Spivak, 1988, pp. 211.

## Death and Sex

Over the years, Molinari has expanded her pretty knits to collections of sexy and spicy Lolita clothes, which generated \$375 million in sales in 1994.<sup>127</sup>

Sugar and spice and everything VICE that's what Anna Molinari's girls are made of.<sup>128</sup>

Prostitution and death are common bed-fellows -- especially in this, the age of AIDS. The prostitute has always figured prominently in psychoanalytic discourse as a trope for death -- as both harbinger of death (disease) and as a violent psychic reminder of the death of culture (animalistic sexuality).<sup>129</sup> In Sarah Webster Goodwin's article, "Romanticism and the Ghost of Prostitution," she points the way to an understanding of the 'liminal' and unstable role of the prostitute in Western culture. Goodwin points out that the prostitute is "...a liminal being who moves between social and psychological categories, the prostitute destabilizes systems, indeed threatens even the *fundamental binary opposition between life and death*."<sup>130</sup> In Anna Molinari's *Blumarine* advertisement there is a complex play on the various psychic roles played by the prostitute and her constant attendant -- death.

<sup>127</sup> No author credited. "Milan: Disco Madness is Hitting Hard All Over..." *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 168, no. 66 (October 4, 1994), pp. 6.

<sup>128</sup> Ilari, A., "Molinari: A Label of Her Own. Anna Molinari." *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 170, no. 42 (August 31, 1995), pp. 82.

<sup>129</sup> States S. Goodwin, "Most obviously the prostitute figures forth repressed and illicit desires, "depraved" sexuality, the woman's "unchaste" body, the animal that is on the margin of the human being, social intercourse at its most crudely physical." E. Bronfen and S. Goodwin, 1993, pp. 158.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159.

In this section I will begin by looking at the media-life of *Blumarine's* central character, Carré Otis ("Meet the Otis-Rourkes"), the overall structure of the advertisement, and the advertisement's photographer Helmut Newton. In the next section "Salome Redux," I will move closer to this advertisement and consider the alignment, effected by Newton, between the model, the prostitute, and death. In the last section, "Misfitting the Narrative: *Chora* and *Trilby*," I will consider the final two photos in this advertisement (figures 55 and 56) as a text upon which can be read both an oppressive tale of retribution and a critical commentary on the over-determination of "woman" in the eyes of "man".

### **Tabloid Life: Meet The Otis-Rourkes...**

Once he shackled her to his Harley, photographing her slathered in motor grease. Since model Carré Otis broke up with actor Mickey Rourke six months ago, she has been free of such displays of affection. But last week Rourke was lurking at the fall fashion shows in Manhattan. "I wish he would stay away," said Otis, fearing he was stalking her. Not so, said Rourke, "I come in peace." The next night he trashed his \$5,000-a-night hotel suite.<sup>131</sup>

A source tells us that the battling Rourkes--that would be Mickey Rourke and his estranged wife, model Carré Otis, who filed spousal-battery charges against him in July for allegedly slapping her, knocking her down and kicking her (the charges were dropped after Otis failed to testify against him last month)--will get back together "real soon." . . .<sup>132</sup>

<sup>131</sup> No author credited, "Carré Tries to Slip a Mickey," *TIME Domestic*, Volume 144, No. 20 (November 14, 1994), no page number cited.

<sup>132</sup> *People Magazine (USA)*, January 16th 1995.

Middle-aged renegade Mickey Rourke and his wife, model Carré Otis, have come to value the sanctity of marriage. The couple, separated since Otis accused Rourke of physically abusing her, are now "very happy," said a Rourke-Otis spokesman, "like lovebirds."<sup>133</sup>

Model Carré Otis, Mrs. Mickey Rourke, is in a Rome hospital after collapsing following the christening of the couple's godchild, the New York Daily News reports. The 26-year-old Otis recently underwent back surgery and found herself unable to walk after the ceremony, her spokesman said, adding that reports that Otis is pregnant are untrue.<sup>134</sup>

Carré Otis, the model discussed above and the model in the advertisement to be studied in this chapter, was involved in an abusive relationship with her on-again, off-again husband, actor Mickey Rourke. Their relationship made headlines early in 1995 when Otis filed a court case against him, the charge being physical assault. Stories of marital ills, violence, drug abuse and sexual excesses seem always certain to draw an adoring and subtly appalled audience. However, nothing is more certain to fascinate than when these same stories take place in the glittering unreality of Hollywood. These stories fascinate because of the intrusion of the human, the unpredictable, the violent, and the unsavory into a world within which, we are led to believe, live the most sublimely happy and beautiful people.

Understandably, this particular sequence (as yet unfinished) of personal tragedy and pain was pounced upon by the media. Thus, as both response to

<sup>133</sup> No author cited, no title, *TIME Domestic*, Volume 145, No. 7 (February 13, 1995), no page number.

<sup>134</sup> No author credited, "Carré-Out," *People Daily (USA)*, Wednesday June 5, 1996, no page number cited.



and critique of this media-exploitation (of which, we will later see, this advertisement also plays a part), Anna Molinari's *Blumarine* advertisement, attempts to effect a critical stand by pointing the finger at our ghoulish fascinations. Through a series of carefully constructed photos, it becomes clear that my position as spectator has been undermined and I, the viewer, am drawn into this series of violent photos. Through various compositional and framing techniques, I have been positioned as killer, and, thereby, I become actively engaged in the production and consumption of the model's pain.

The photographer for this spread, it is useful to note, is the controversial Helmut Newton. Newton's photographic career has spanned a number of decades and, according to some, has brought a new "shamelessness" to the photographing of women. His photos, taken in "sci-fi" or "sterile settings", "...flirted with pornography and misogyny, to the great chagrin of feminists everywhere."<sup>135</sup> Newton's style has always been controversial; his recent photos of both Carré Otis - to be discussed in this chapter - and German model Nadja Auerman (who was photographed variously in a leg brace, wheel-chair, and on crutches, having no need for these devices in real-life, as a part of a photo shoot to display the upcoming season's clothing - *Vogue*, January 1995) have very much pushed the limits of 'acceptability' in the fashion magazine. In a discussion of his photographic techniques and their relation to women Rosetta Brookes remarks:

<sup>135</sup> From:<http://www.altculture.com/site/entries-text/hxnewtonx.html>. For a feminist analysis of the works of Helmut Newton please refer to: R. Brookes, "Fashion Photography: The Double-Page Spread: Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdin & Deborah Turbeville," *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, J. Ash and E. Wilson, California: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 17-24.

The Helmut Newton model is one of a type, presented with the cold distance of a fleshy automaton, an extension of the technology which manipulates her and converts her into an object. Her veneer, which is at one with the gloss of the image, is to be flicked past and consumed in a moment.<sup>136</sup>

States Newton, "The nudes and bondage shots were my way of going beyond my own bounds."<sup>137</sup> The camera as prosthetic libido.

<sup>136</sup> R. Brookes, 1992, pp. 19.

<sup>137</sup> From: <http://www.salon1999.com/07/features/helmut2.html>

## Salome Redux

Fashion has turned to sex, gloss, and violence ... It's flirting with synthetics, lethal heels, toxic colour, and dangerous - very dangerous images of women.<sup>138</sup>

On political correctness, Newton states: "This political correctness in America, it scares me, it reminds me of my youth in Nazi Germany."<sup>139</sup>

There are four distinct poses in the *Blumarine* advertisement. Two of the poses are shot in black and white and two are shot in high-chroma colour. At first glance, the photos seem to be a narrative construct which brings the reader from Otis' ostensible freedom in the first shot (figure 53) to her death in the last shot (figure 56). However, on closer examination, these photos seem to present only two scenarios, with two modalities (black and white, and colour) to each scenario. The first scenario presents the model as self-possessed and beckoning. In the black-and-white shot Otis is photographed on a cliff, arms outstretched, gazing off into the distance. This first shot contains the enigmatic figure of a Borzoi or Russian Wolfhound; a breed of dog which was slaughtered by Russian peasants during the various uprisings of the late 19th century, as a reaction against the opulence and excess of the aristocratic Tsarist regime.<sup>140</sup> The opening photo is both counterpoised and correlated with the

<sup>138</sup> Mower, S., "Now For the Hard Stuff: Revival of 70's Hardcore Glamour Fashion," in *Harper's Bazaar*, July 1994, pp. 82.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid..

<sup>140</sup> N. Rich, *The Age of Nationalism and Reform: 1850-1890*, New York: W. W. Northon and Company, 1970, pp. 183. Of course it is also worthy to note the constellation of meaning that the dog metonymically stands in for. "Dog" - worthless person, predatory, esp. male; "To go to the dogs" - to fall into ruin; "Dog" - an unattractive woman or girl; "Dog" - an investment not worth its price. Dogs are also potent symbols for faithfulness, comfort and home "Dogs are a man's best friend." (Definitions taken from *Webster's New Dictionary and*

subsequent coloured shot (figure 54) of Otis on a pile of garbage - in the form of french tabloid magazines. Here, seemingly self-aware of her sexual prowess, Otis both beckons me the viewer (positioned as the white-sneakered male) and threatens me with her dangerously placed high-heel shoe. Both the black-and-white and the colour photo present us with a woman who is "highly sexual" and therefore dangerous.

The second scenario positions the model as muse and object of the unhindered (male) gaze. The black-and-white photo (figure 55) here presents us with Otis bound to a pillar (pillory?) by her hair. Her hands are drawn in; she is proffering her breasts to us the viewer; her eyes are obscured by the black of her sunglasses. The following coloured photo (figure 56) presents the model as dead, her red tongue swollen in her mouth, her breasts thrust forward and her arm pinned down by her assassin -- me (structurally), the white sneakered viewer.

In both colour photos, the tabloid background is laid out to not only to metaphorically bind the model to the media-world of cultural effluent (*trash*), but also to expose various headlines that reinforce the narrative of the text. For example, the first photo prominently features other pictures of naked women: to the left of the model one can see a picture supposedly of a prostitute ("Bombes Sexuelles de Carlos") shown hiding her breasts from the camera, her eyes blacked out. Interestingly, because of its link to the media characterization of Rourke (see above), the only tabloid headline that is repeated twice is one which reads "Ado, ce n'était qu'un gars presque ordinaire" ("Ado was but an

almost ordinary guy”) and refers, upon closer examination, to a man “...passant son temps sous l’escalier à regarder sous les jupes” (“...passing his time under the stairs looking up skirts”). Most telling is the headline closest to Otis’ head: “Son faux mari lui a fait une sacrée corrida!” (“Her false husband has been having a damned fling on her!”) The construction of this sentence, when read on its own, highlights the positioning of the woman (Otis) as victim in the photographed relation, but when taken in context with the rest of the trash one gets the feeling that Otis cannot be seen as wholly innocent -- indeed, it is her body, not the man’s, that *blends* with the trash.

We are not allowed to forget that the model and her real life are imploding into one-another and mixing into a hyperreal collage wherein it is impossible to separate her suffering from that of the cultural detritus surrounding her. She moves from the first colour photo -- the background full of headlines, her shirt even ‘printed’ with text (“Easy to pick-up! The low-down on a come on girl!”) -- to the second colour photo where the media detritus is inarticulate. There are no more headlines in the second colour photo, just random media-babble, news that so easily slips from our memory as we turn from page to page - her death has become, if not old, then certainly inconsequential, news. Therefore, the pressing question becomes: how does this advertisement work within the complex system of desire and death in Western culture and, perhaps more importantly, (how) does this advertisement *misfit* the fashion magazine and *signal the way* to a reading *against the grain*?

## Misfitting the Narrative: Chora and Trilby

*The Act of prostitution comes to mirror the process of consumption, in which self-respect is reified in the consumed object, arbitrary signifier of perpetually receding fulfilment.*<sup>141</sup>

I would like to focus on a reading of the last two photos in the series (figures 55 and 56), two photos which I believe act as the site of retribution (and critique) of the model's over-determination through the omnipotent gaze of the camera.

The first of these two photos presents the beautiful and powerful model bound to her (empty) house (figure 55) -- the latter day caryatid, a bejewelled accoutrement for her husband (you [I] the viewer). Not only does this bondage bespeak a violence of a physical nature, but it speaks of her symbolic erasure and elimination through incorporation into architecture. Her body becomes a Rococo flourish to an otherwise vacant modern(ist) interior: "...the human proportions of classicism are played out on this representation of a fashionably-embellished woman's body...her body perpetuates the (unchallenged) notion of captive (female) body literally "standing in" for a column. This model, furthermore, is captive in either sense of a state of powerlessness/confinement, or being captivated/enraptured."<sup>142</sup>

In the second shot, because of the threat posed by *the femme fatale*

<sup>141</sup> Sarah Goodwin, 1990, pp. 168.

<sup>142</sup> C. Hammond, 1996, pp. 64. Hammond is referring, in this quote, to a photograph from the "Some Day I'll Be A Famous Fashion Model..." advertisement (see chapter 2) figure 2, but I feel that her analysis of the image is also pertinent in the context of the *Blumarine* advertisement.

(even in confinement), she is killed, as a prostitute, for transgressing the threshold between beckoning object of desire and deadly castrative *other*. She is killed to both stabilize her position within the sign system of the *glamorous* and to cover over the castrative threat that resides within the psychological construct *Woman*: "[the corpse's] beauty marks the purification and distance from two moments of insecurity - female sexuality and decay." [Bronfen p. 11].

I believe that these two photos present a cogent indictment (whether intended or not) of the Western conception of how the body of *Woman* is to operate within the symbolic exchange of signs. The first situation - woman in/as home - engages the familiar trope of what Linda Curti terms the claustrophobic female space.<sup>143</sup> The second - the stabilization of the *feminine-threat* through death - places the emphasis on concepts of desire and retribution in representation.

Woman in/as home draws upon a range of archetypal images of woman as "space" [receptacle] for man. Mary Ann Doane has remarked that filmic space is "...continually being outlined, territorialized, divided along sexual lines."<sup>144</sup> This delineation of space is a motivated mapping - for it is the feminine that it seeks to both ascribe and contain. As Elizabeth Grosz points out in her analysis of space in architecture, "Women, *Chora*, Dwelling" (1995), the *Chora* "...functions primarily as a receptacle, the storage point, the locus of

<sup>143</sup> States Curti, "In television narratives the split is between open spaces, mainly metropolitan scenes specific to male narratives, and closed claustrophobic spaces allotted to women, mainly in soap opera or in such feminizations of male genres as female police series." L. Curti, 1992, pp. 147.

<sup>144</sup> M. Doane, "The 'Woman's Film' -- Possession and Address." *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London: BFI, 1987, pp. 17.

nurturance in the transition necessary for the emergence of matter, a kind of womb of material existence, the nurse of becoming.”<sup>145</sup> In a less obscure but related manner, Curti draws the parallels between woman, architecture and space, stating,

...there is also another space, that of the woman alone, the space of lack and desire. Often represented as a *prison*, it is a topos for melodrama...Thanks to a succession of metonymic passages, we go from the home to the room, from the room to parts of it...to the markers of its boundaries such as doors and windows, arches and angels...<sup>146</sup>

It can be clearly seen that the body of Carré Otis is *bound* to interior space, becomes a part of the domestic space but, as evidenced by the severe [masculine] modernity, she has no control over the borders of this space. She has become the embodiment of the *Chora* in the Platonic sense<sup>147</sup>:

I was your house. And, when you leave, abandoning the dwelling place, I do not know what to do with these walls of mine. Have I ever had a body other than the one which you constructed according to your idea of it? Have I ever experienced a skin other than the one which you wanted me to dwell within?<sup>148</sup>

<sup>145</sup> E. Grosz, 1995, p. 114. The concept of *Chora* is a difficult one to stabilize in definition, but it emanates from a Platonic concept of “space” defined as feminine. Due to this ambiguous nature the term *Chora* has entered the cannon of deconstruction (via Derrida) as a privileged term of indeterminacy - a liminal space of transition. Grosz and, earlier, Irigaray have taken on this indeterminacy as a site whereupon one can see the alignment of femininity with a “self-less” space of transition. Grosz states, “*Chora*, then is the space in which place is made possible, the chasm for the passage of spaceless Forms into a spatialized reality, a dimensionless tunnel opening itself to spatialization, obliterating itself to make others possible and actual.” p. 116.

<sup>146</sup> L. Curti, 1992, pp. 147.

<sup>147</sup> “[stripping] women of an existence either autonomous from or symmetrical with men’s: [the *Chora*] relegates women to the position of support or precondition of the masculine...” E. Grosz, 1995, pp. 122.

<sup>148</sup> L. Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, trans. J. Collie and J. Still, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 49.



There she stands, doing what it is that is expected of her (existing as the sartorial display of her husband's wealth) but she is not idle, complacent, or abiding. For her knuckles are fortified with elegantly camouflaged brass knuckles. Her head is tilted upward, shooting a challenging gaze from behind the reflective screen of her glasses. Her hands cup her breasts. This is not a photograph of the abiding embodiment of the "selfless space of becoming." There is a threat - even if controlled - to the law of the father (ostensibly her husband). Interestingly, Lacan once remarked, "*le père ou le piré*" (the father or the pire).<sup>149</sup>

In the last photo of this advertisement Otis lies dead, her arm pinned to the ground. Symbolic order has been reinstated. I, the viewer, come face to face with the most blatant indictment of fashion's dangerous game: where does the dream of frozen perfection, as explored throughout this thesis, stop being 'just' a representational game of the fashion magazine and manifest itself in actual physical and mental abuse? Where is the line between mediated representation and physical action? It is intimated, in this last photo, through the clear reference to Baudrillard's concept of implosion and media hyperreality, that it happened long ago. So long ago, in fact, that the representation of pain, bondage, and death, can now be savoured as (morally edifying) aesthetic events. Helmut Newton hauls out the appealing costume of duMaurier's heroine from the eponymously entitled novel, *Trilby* (1894), arguably one of the

<sup>149</sup> J. F. MacCannell, "Facing Facism: A Feminine Politics of Jouissance," W. Apollon and R. Feldstein (eds.), *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 65.

"...most universally admired best-sellers of the 1890's,"<sup>150</sup> for Otis to wear.

It is a costume that suits Otis well. Trilby O'Ferrall (homonym with the word *feral* does not seem to be an accident), raised by French bohemians, was once feared for her sexually abundant nature ("...[a] tall, straight, flat-backed, square shouldered, deep-chested, full-bosomed young grisette."<sup>151</sup>), but after her run-in with the cruel and exploitative Svengali becomes the model of virtue and cleanliness. Nonetheless, this transformation is predicated on her dying, for Svengali has used her as a mouth-piece for his music<sup>152</sup> so severely that she is no longer able to function. More to the point, she couldn't be *allowed* to live to tell of her sexually excessive ways; structurally, there had to be *some* retribution. Her dying body is admired by the trio of "well-scrubbed British heroes" (Dijkstra, 1986, pp. 35) who liberated her from the grip of Svengali; her withering health and beauty become fetishized by these well-bred necrophiles who enthuse that "...delicate little frosty wrinkles had gathered round her eyes; there were grey streaks in her hair; all strength, straightness and elasticity seemed to have gone out of her..." (duMaurier, pp. 310) Her threat, her sexuality, her agency is effectively drained; Trilby, as Otis, has been 'stabilized':

150 B. Dijkstra, 1986, pp. 35.

151 G. DuMaurier, *Trilby*, London: Everyman's Library, 1994 (originally published in 1894). Cited in Dijkstra, 1986, pp. 35.

152 The character of Svengali has many resonances in the popular imagination as the figure of a mad [artistic] genius who is able to draw women under his spell and get them to 'actualize' his art. Most notably, Andrew Lloyd Weber's 'Phantom' in *The Phantom of the Opera*, 'actualizes' Christine's voice, as he attempts to make her his "Angel of Music".

...now that she has ceased to be a direct sexual threat, Trilby is free to become the true sexless, high-Victorian feminine ideal: the woman who, in her very physical helplessness, makes no further overt erotic demands upon the male, guaranteeing him a restful respite from the energy-draining requirements of sexual involvement and thereby proving to him that even in the 1890's, the heyday of the dreadful 'new woman,' she could still be the same as she used to be in her mother's day: a comforting emissary from the spiritual realm rather than a dangerous, competing inhabitant of the world of aggression and exchange. (Dijkstra, pp. 36)

Unlike Trilby, however, Otis is never purified. Her stability is frozen in 'garbage', merchandise (which the corpse is still peddling) and trashy tabloid tattles. Why this disjunction between stories which are so alike in their approach to the archetype of the 'redeemed whore'? I would contend that it is because, unlike the morality tale in *Trilby*, Newton's representation of Otis is meant to capitalize on the frisson produced from a combination of shock, appal, and interest - not unlike the attraction one feels in the supermarket queue to the lurid stories of tabloid newspapers. The message is that the only difference between the trash tabloid and the slick fashion magazine is the packaging. The ink may not leave a trace on your fingers if you read *Harper's Bazaar*, but the impact of a culture obsessed with putting models on a pedestal only to (gleefully) knock them down remains the same.

Therefore, both Trilby and Otis are the embodiment of morality tales, penned and photographed, respectively, by men. I believe, however, that in Newton's spread there is an important shift in the construction of death. The body of Otis is not just a locus for our projections and imaginings, a vessel to filled with meaning. She is also a producer of meaning. She floats next to her own body -- this ad is meant to play upon the role her "other" *real* body plays

in a violent and abusive relationship -- a spectre of her own *mediated* death, and points a finger at us, the readers. No matter how earnest my reading of this advertisement is, I am doubly indicted as both the structurally situated male (outlined above) and as a consumer -- consuming an aestheticized version of her pain.

This then is the misfit. The story, wherein the heroine dies and is purified through her death, is not told properly. Otis is never purified. She remains beautiful, but that only heightens my *disease*: I am forced to look at her and, seeing her beauty, stare. However, she cannot look back because she has been killed, murdered under consumer culture's watchful eye -- my eyes. Death, then, does not operate here as closure; Hollywood's ending is no where in sight: the text stutters relentlessly on the discordant note of meaningless violence in an ever receding (and exceeding) media-scape.

To conclude this section, I wish to look back sceptically at my own reading. I ask myself, "Am I letting an extremely violent advertisement off too easily?" but I cannot find an answer. Everywhere I turn, for either reassurance or criticism, I am presented with contingencies. Terry Eagleton points out in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), that there is a very uneasy and often frustrating relationship between the individual and the structure of capitalist culture, especially when one attempts to critique this structure. The positions

of art/culture and commodity/critique are radically ambiguous,<sup>153</sup> inasmuch as they exist within the limitations of a capitalist structure. Even the most radical critique cannot wholly transcend the system within which it works without becoming incoherent and, ultimately, invisible to many of those with whom it is trying to communicate.<sup>154</sup> To further complicate this, one also has to keep in mind my earlier discussion of hyperreality and the absolute ephemerality of the commodity: the commodity in the postmodern has become so flexible that it can commodify anything, paradoxically because the commodity per se does not exist in any discrete form from other aspects of culture. As Baudrillard points out in his discussion of the fractal stage of the economy:

...[in] the fourth stage, which I will call the fractal stage, or also, the viral stage, or still, the irradiated state of value, there is no longer a referent at all. The value irradiates in all directions, filling in all interstices, without bearing reference to anything whatsoever except by way of mere continuity.<sup>155</sup>

I believe that it is this very promiscuity of the product and its ability to commodify both life and style that saves this advertisement from being yet another contrived story of death and redemption as seen in duMaurier's *Trilby*. To take a detour, I would like to briefly look at an article that appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in February 1995, a month before the *Blumarine* advertisement ran. The article entitled "Sex Games" demonstrates the above-mentioned 'promiscuity of the product' in a striking manner through its elision of the 'self'

<sup>153</sup>Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 374.

<sup>154</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 375.

<sup>155</sup>Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 1983, pp. 52.

and the product (clothes) into one being. The author of the article, in her discussion of the trend to dress 'sexy', discusses the ability of fashion to create a *more total person*. To quote at length:

What fashion does have on its side is an unerring sense of timing -- in this case generating images of sex-dressing exactly when feminists are ready to tackle the subject head-on...[these clothes are] an invitation to see what it feels like to be provocative. [It] doesn't mean, of course, that you have to follow through. Just wearing these clothes may be as good as sex itself. There's even a chance it could be better."<sup>156</sup>

Sexuality has become part and parcel with the wearing of these *new* clothes, their talismanic properties will guide the wearer into a new understanding of her body through the commodity. "Sex Dressing" highlights, in a clear manner, the presentation of merchandise in the fractal economy of the fashion magazine and the commodification of an identity politics based in sexual freedom. Thus, by colonizing the more popular aspects of sexual/identity politics, fashion is able to insinuate itself into a discourse of understanding the body in culture. However, when fashion *commodifies* these politics, they become ephemeral commodities: identity politics as a fashionable hand-bag which will most surely be out of style next year. I bring Mower's article up here because it is her vocalized understanding of the commodity fused to the body which the *Blumarine* advertisement sets itself up to critique. Newton relies heavily on the coding of the model as inhuman 'commodity' (in a fractal economy) to communicate his critique of the dehumanizing violence of representation in the media (as the presence of the tabloids explode the genre of the fashion magazine). He places her both as a mannequin for selling clothes (the

<sup>156</sup> S. Mower, "Sex Games," *Harper's Bazaar*, February 1995, pp. 171.

possibilities for poses are endless) and as a human whose life is being atomized into an economy of printed words -- an economy which accepts only pain and suffering as viable currency.

My attempt at scepticism is thwarted, but I remain uneasy. I am faced with a seemingly unresolvable problem: if critique within capitalist culture can not conceivably transcend the main tenets of capitalism, if the *Blumarine* ad does not exist without the plain fact that it is selling a commodity within a market system which it is (incidentally) critiquing, then can any critique escape recuperation? Can this *Blumarine* ad escape what is so plainly visible -- that is, the fact that, while one posits a critique of the violence of viewing and consuming through the use of excessive and 'ironic' violence, one is, at the same time, reinscribing those very power structures that were to be critiqued in her or his own work? Or, as Brookes remarks, "...scenes of rape and death are [so] commonplace in film and television that they can be treated with such distance in fashion photography...It is the deathly aura of mediation which encases everything in gloss."<sup>157</sup> Can Anna Molinari's *Blumarine* advertisement ever fully escape the fact that by presenting violence on the body of Woman, Newton is, in turn, inuring us to a horror that can never be wholly self-reflexive?

<sup>157</sup> R. Brookes, 1992, pp. 19.

# I like fashion, I like the future:

...no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present...This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text.<sup>158</sup>

There is a danger in writing about fashion: transformation. As soon as one writes something definitive about fashion it becomes dated.<sup>159</sup> The 'word' on fashion is transiency. However, I think we are beguiled by the speed of fashion's changes and forget that any signification is swept away by the living: words spoken can never be withdrawn; they mark a time, place a marker in the flux of living. Words and ideas go out of style just as surely, if not as quickly, as styles of dress. The point is this: communication is never timeless, it is warped, (excised, modified, transformed) by memory. Communication can never be *definitive* because it is a scaffolding (temporary, transient, mobile) which we use to structure and form *meaning*. Communication as convention is a covering, a dress that, for a moment, fits more or less to size. So, as I draw this communication to a close, I would like to, at once, look back over the territory we have traversed and look forward into those areas that remain unexplored - pathways started but unfinished that ask to be taken up and explored further.

It has been made clear that fashion operates on a structural assumption

<sup>158</sup> J. Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago, 1981, pp. 26.

<sup>159</sup> As Barthes remarks, "Fashion is a discourse that vehemently denies its own recent past - as a discourse predicated on the disavowal of its own historic construction...Fashion dogmatically rejects the fashion which preceded it, its own past, every new fashion is a refusal to inherit...fashion experiences itself as a Right, the natural right of the present over the past." *The Fashion System*, 1981, pp. 273.



of death, but this is hardly a surprise; we all live our lives in the knowledge that we will die, and surely this end will make itself manifest in our imaginings.<sup>160</sup> Troubling is the fact that our imaginings of death occur so frequently, and with such intensity, on the body of woman. It is to *her* that culture attributes its horrors and fairy-tales, and it does so gladly, as long as she promises to die -- gracefully, noisily, whimpering, happily, stupidly, mutely -- because she does it with such finesse.

Fashion and death share a privileged link, as we have seen, through their insistence on solidity and completion, on finality. Fashion's language becomes "comprehensible" in the frozen moment - the unpredictability of *life* is disallowed on the set of a carefully constructed photo-shoot. In these glossed (and glossy) renditions of life, the fashion model, and the fashion she displays, is safe from the clutches of death: she has become the ideal through the eye of the camera. As was demonstrated, it is this tension produced through paradox (the point of plenitude and perfection is also the point of death) that creates both a rich and troubling ground upon which to study Western culture's dreams of death.

Nonetheless, as I soon found out, critique and compliance become disturbingly inter-fused when products must be sold to increasingly media-savvy and cynical consumers.<sup>161</sup> The relation between image, consumer and

<sup>160</sup> As Freud points out - it is the death drive that articulates the perimeter of our lives. Pleasure, then, is constructed on the knowledge of death, states Copjec, "...[neither] of these two "warring" principles ever ultimately win out over the other, since the very existence of the empirical field presupposes the existence of its cause, and since no cause can ever exist abstractly, in the absence of that which it effects." pp. 13.

<sup>161</sup> See R. Liberman, 1994.

desire is deeply conflicted: fashion as a dreamed-of escape from the unpredictability of life (and certainty of death) is constructed through images which rely on culturally familiar tropes of death and stillness - the product as escape. Therefore, can analyses of a mode of representation -- modes so firmly entrenched that to imagine an alternative would require a wholesale abandonment of the fashion image and the "culture" of fashion (not to mention the entire psychic schema upon which fashion images feed) -- be anything more than hand wringing in the grave-yard?

I believe it can be much more. These images, as has been amply demonstrated from a theoretical perspective, both conform and counteract the "monologic" language of *fashion* under which they labours. These challenges to a solidified/closed language open up both an internal dialogue, in which images, advertising and the structural "being" of the fashion magazine engage each other in (between) the context of the covers; and an external dialogue which draws the consumer into an engagement with the content of the fashion magazine. In this intermingling, the reader and language come face to face -- one is positioned in relation to, and by, the other. Seeing the interaction of fashion reader and fashion text in this light, it becomes evident that through an engagement with the (supposedly) authoritarian language of fashion at the points where it cracks (where its perfect "grammar" no longer works -- where it comes apart at the seams) one has the chance to re-work the ideas presented. This is not reading against the grain, but finding grains that seem to run in one's direction ... and extending them.

In each analysis we saw fashion images that, although beautiful and

fashionable, included an excessiveness that demanded to be read. In this excess, the fantasies of death, beauty and femininity came clearly to the fore whether as narrative affect, structural necessity or representational practice. I don't believe that by simply "reading" these images we will find a way out of the deadly fashionable morgue that the fashion magazine (and other representational practices in the West) has constructed. I do believe that by creating reading practices that can engage such 'slippery' texts as fashion, we will -- as feminists, academics, and consumers -- be better equipped to engage texts once thought of as monolithic, closed, or unreadable.

Nonetheless, to return to my earlier sceptical ways, I am haunted by Eagleton's prognostication of the futility of critique within a capitalist framework. I wonder whether or not these advertisements are just finding new ways to sell a product through emulating (a depoliticized) version of postmodern feminist culture critique? Shelley Budgeon remarks:

... advertisements placed emphasis upon women as independent, free-thinking, and self-determining, these values were appropriated from the political agenda of feminism and placed in the isolated context of isolated individualism and consumerism. Being "your own person" was now made possible through consumption of a vast array of products. Feminism was redefined through commodities. Freedom became defined as the freedom to define oneself through consumption.<sup>162</sup>

I respond in a conflicted way to Budgeon's remarks in that, at first, I want to wholeheartedly agree with her; and then, in the second instant, I realize that saying "Bad! Retrograde! Horrible fashion advertising!" misses the point entirely.

<sup>162</sup> S. Budgeon, "Fashion Magazine Advertising: Constructing Femininity in the "Postfeminist" Era," *Gender and Utopia in Advertising: A Critical Reader*, L. and A. Manca (eds.), Illinois: Procopian Press, 1994, pp. 59.

I am recalled to a point in my own education, when my feminist politics became radical. We had a very popular saying; "You can't take down the master's house with the master's tools." I was quite convinced that this was sage advice until I realized that there were no other hardware stores aside from "the master's." It is simplistic to believe, as I did, that there even is "a [knowable/definable] house" which could be taken down. A centre to 'this' conspiracy, while a comforting thought in its own way, will never be found because it is too diffuse, because oppression is seldom that simple.

Oppression is not always simple because much of what we know (our memories, our habits, our language) is in some way bound to oppressive power-structures. For example, when I was in my early teens, I used to go shopping, quite frequently, with my mother. We would do the first half of the stores in the mall and then stop for some food in the food-court, after which we would emerge, energized and ready for the last half of the stores. These were very happy times, and I will cherish them forever. At the same time, as a critical thinker, I can now see that we were engaging in a blatant display of middle-class privilege, one to which many, many people are not privy. Should I now turn on institutions that facilitated these pleasures and damn them for not being more egalitarian or for being part of an oppressive power structure, when I still take pleasure from these very same sources, in much the same way? Many do, but, I would contend, many are dishonest in so doing. This is the problem with oppression - it is very hard to pin down except in its most extreme moments: it is not simple.

To this end, I have tried to provide a theoretical framework through

which we can apprehend an increasingly complex web of images. Images which have been bound so closely to concepts of bodily desire, cultural imagining and dreaming that we can no longer afford to look at them as *only* aesthetic objects or sites of capitalist recruitment. This framework attempts to come to grips with the nature of fashion and communication; a politically based understanding of *how* we communicate and *which* communications are privileged sites of cultural meaning. It is a structure that, although political, is not intractable, and that both accepts and revels in the fact that within each one of us there are many contradictions, that our politics are seldom consistent. Thus, my methods and analyses have been structured upon the belief that we live our lives in many registers and in many roles. As such, our politics and reading strategies should be as flexible as our lives; we should be able to understand that although the fashion magazine represents an at times dangerously oppressive force within Western culture, it also acts as a locus for dreaming, pleasure, and inspiration. It is imperative that we not see the fashion magazine as total (totalized) -- as I am sure many fashion editors and social commentators would have us do -- but to see it as a focal point for a number of discourses which we can selectively engage, admire and critique. Thus, in the making of this textile, this thesis, the caveat is that we cannot afford moralism:

There may be at least as much potential for change in a T.V. soap-opera as in agit-prop theatre. One reason this has been somewhat neglected is the prevalence of moralism. The mass media is often seen as inescapably locked in an illusory construction of pleasure - pleasure in a created

complacency.<sup>163</sup>

If North American middle-class culture has relocated, as Baudrillard believes, to a garbage heap of cultural detritus, we must become clever scavengers.<sup>164</sup> We must engage those very objects that beckon us dangerously from within a variety of texts. We must become experts at handling images that flicker for a second and then are lost. For if we do not, the media-scape, a land with ever-exceeding horizons, will out-pace us and we will, as critics and commentators, forget the language -- even as we obey its commands. Our vision, already severely compromised, will no longer be able to see beyond images into the privilege and power that maintains their primacy and continued proliferation in the West. In short, it is imperative to engage the commodities that surround us, not to disown them, but to come to grips with the investments that make them a reality.

<sup>163</sup> R. Brunt and C. Rowan, *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, London: Routledge, 1982, pp. 55.

<sup>164</sup> To quote Leslie Rabine: "We must imagine a way to waste affirmatively, bravely, and beautifully, without lapsing into the reactive positions of slimy capitalist cynicism (eg., nothing "really" means anything, so let's be vapid and/or pigs) or priestly repressed moralism. (eg., anyone who is "for real" wouldn't take pleasure in desires artificially constructed around expensive gadgets and little "nothings")" 1993, pp. 247.

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Figure 1: Geof Kern, "Some Day I'll Be a Famous Fashion Model and Wear Beautiful Clothes," in *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 2: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

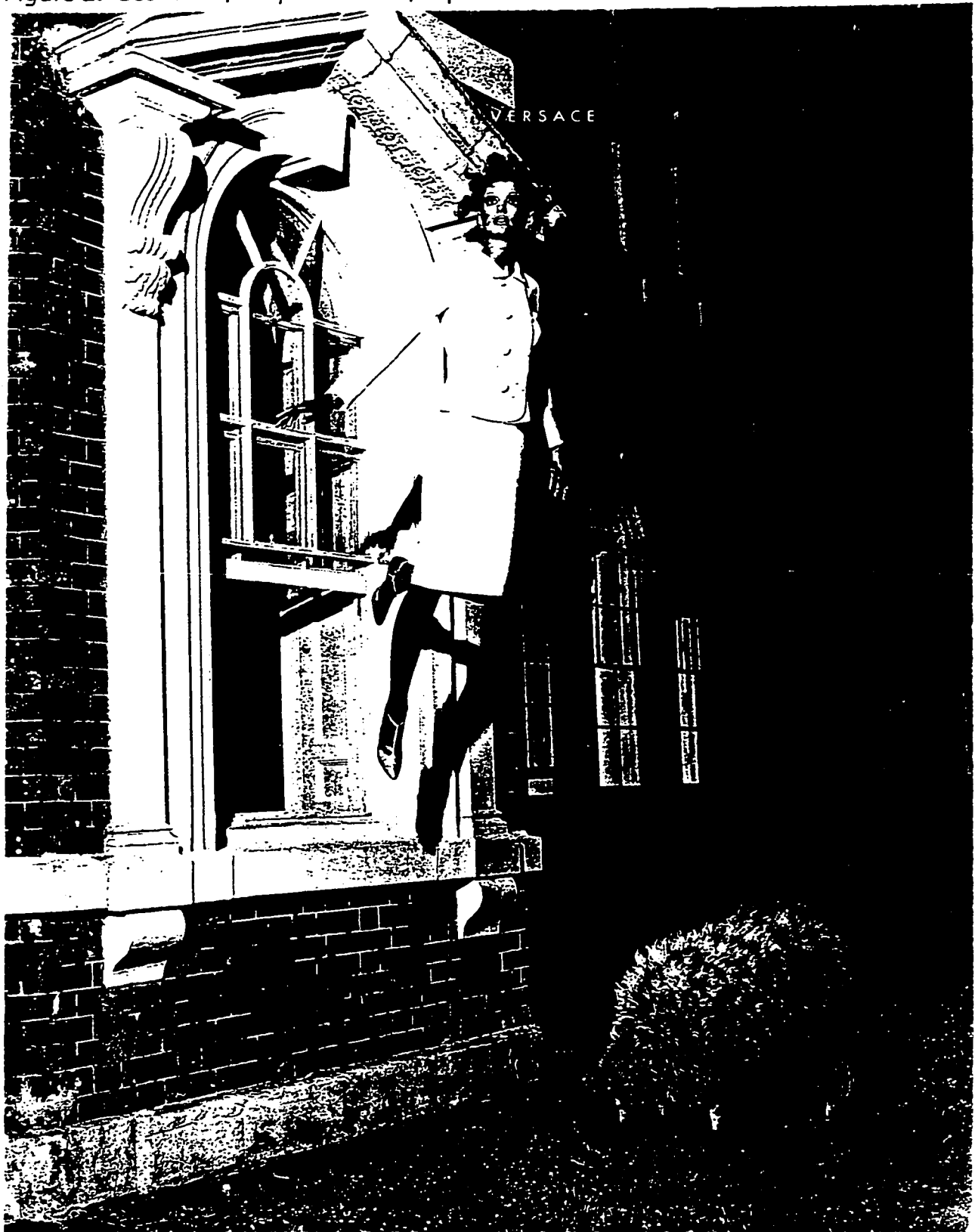


Figure 3: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

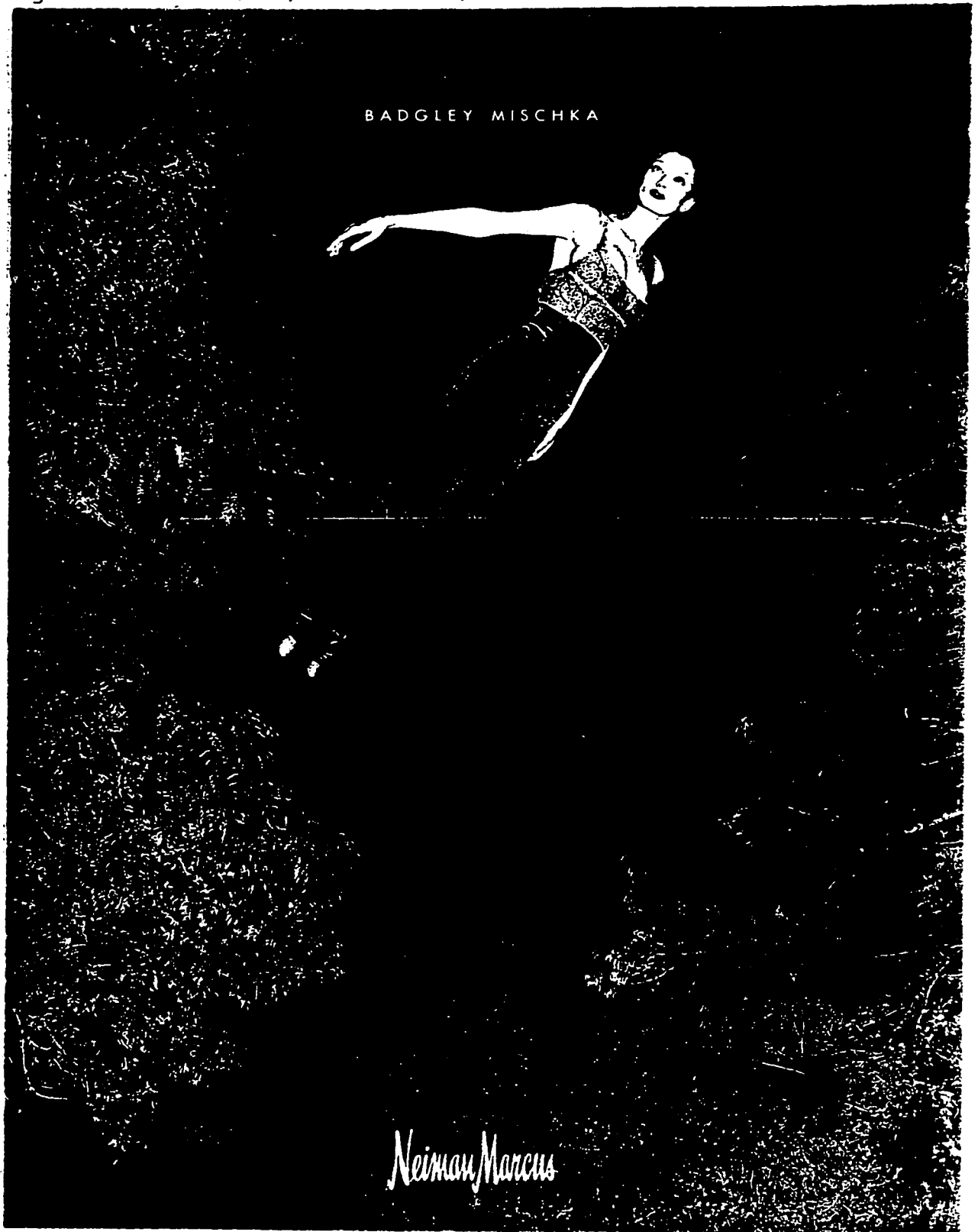


Figure 4: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 5: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 6: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

DONNA KARAN COLLECTION



Figure 7: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 8: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

GIANFRANCO FERRE





Figure 9: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 10: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 11: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

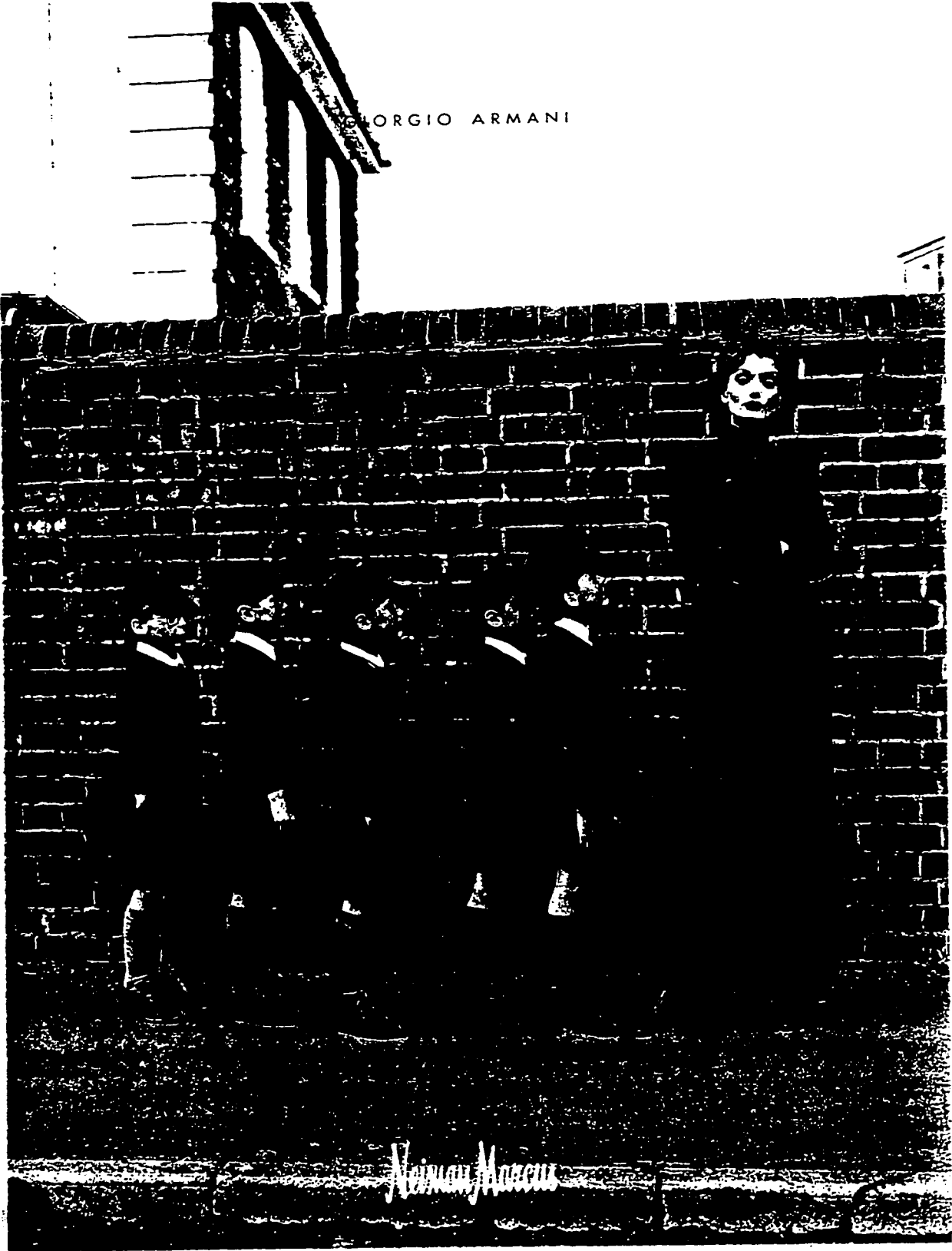


Figure 12: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 13: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

CHRISTIAN LACROIX



Figure 14: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

BILL BLASS



Figure 15: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 16: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

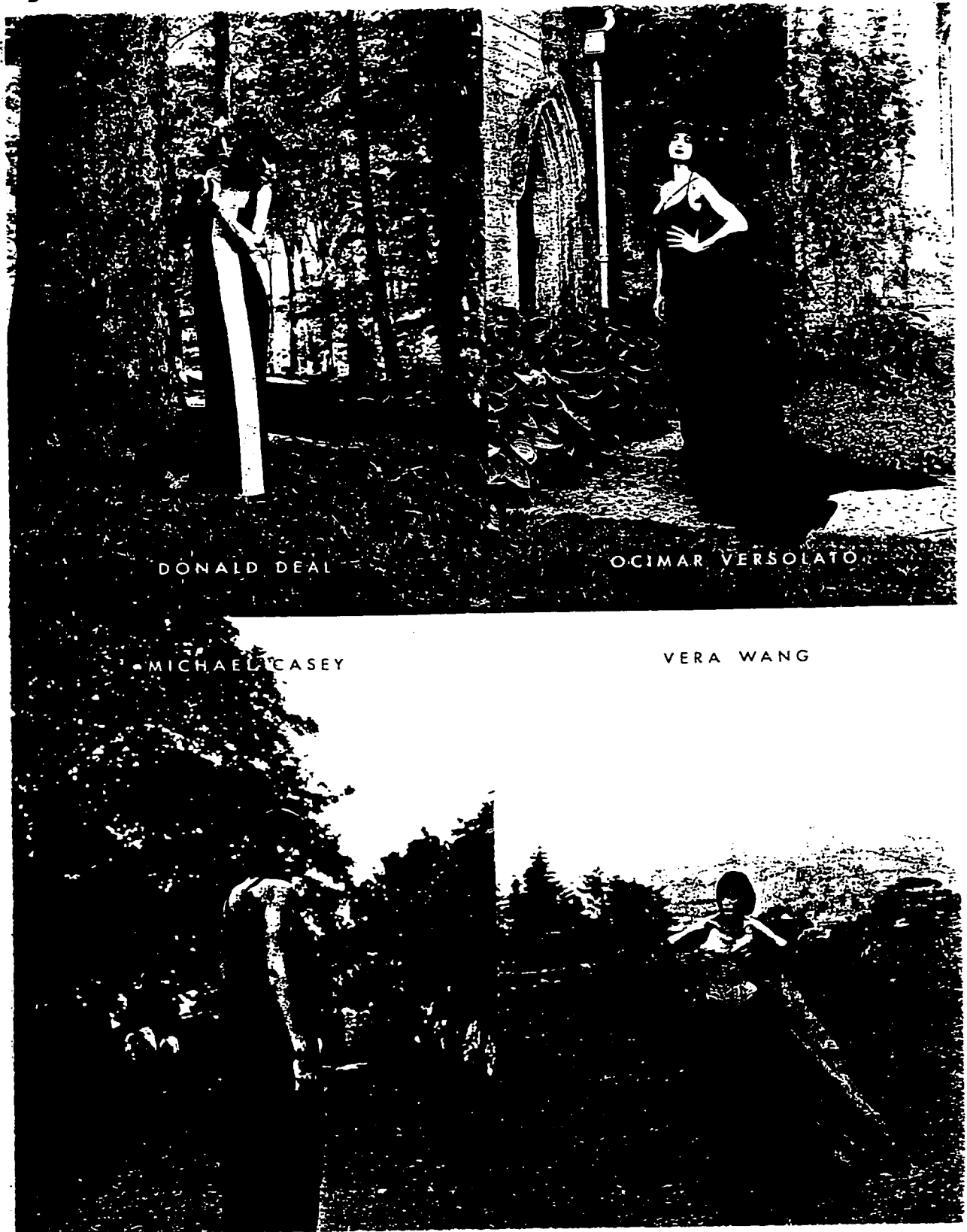




Figure 17: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 18: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

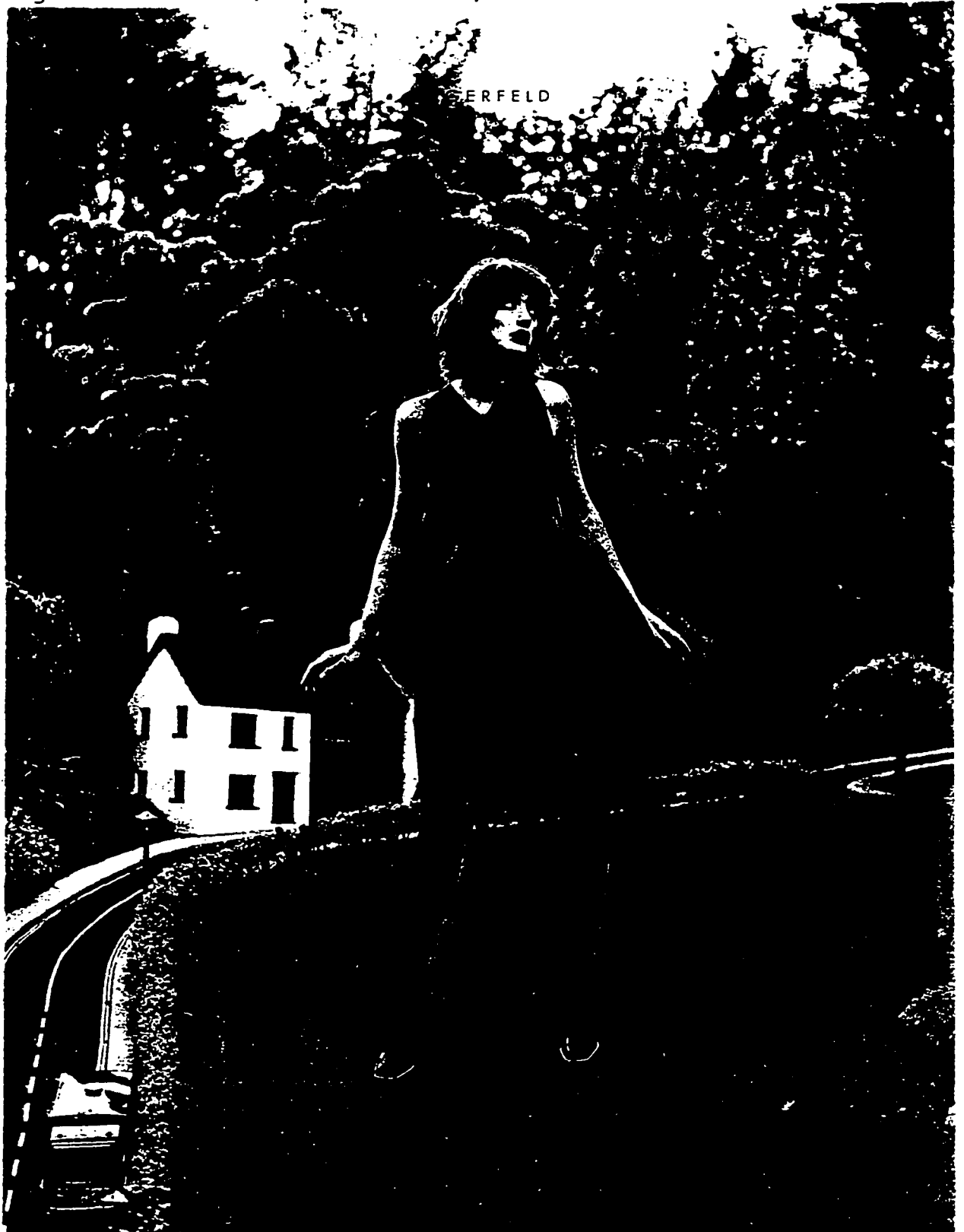


Figure 20: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

MOSCHINO COUTURE!

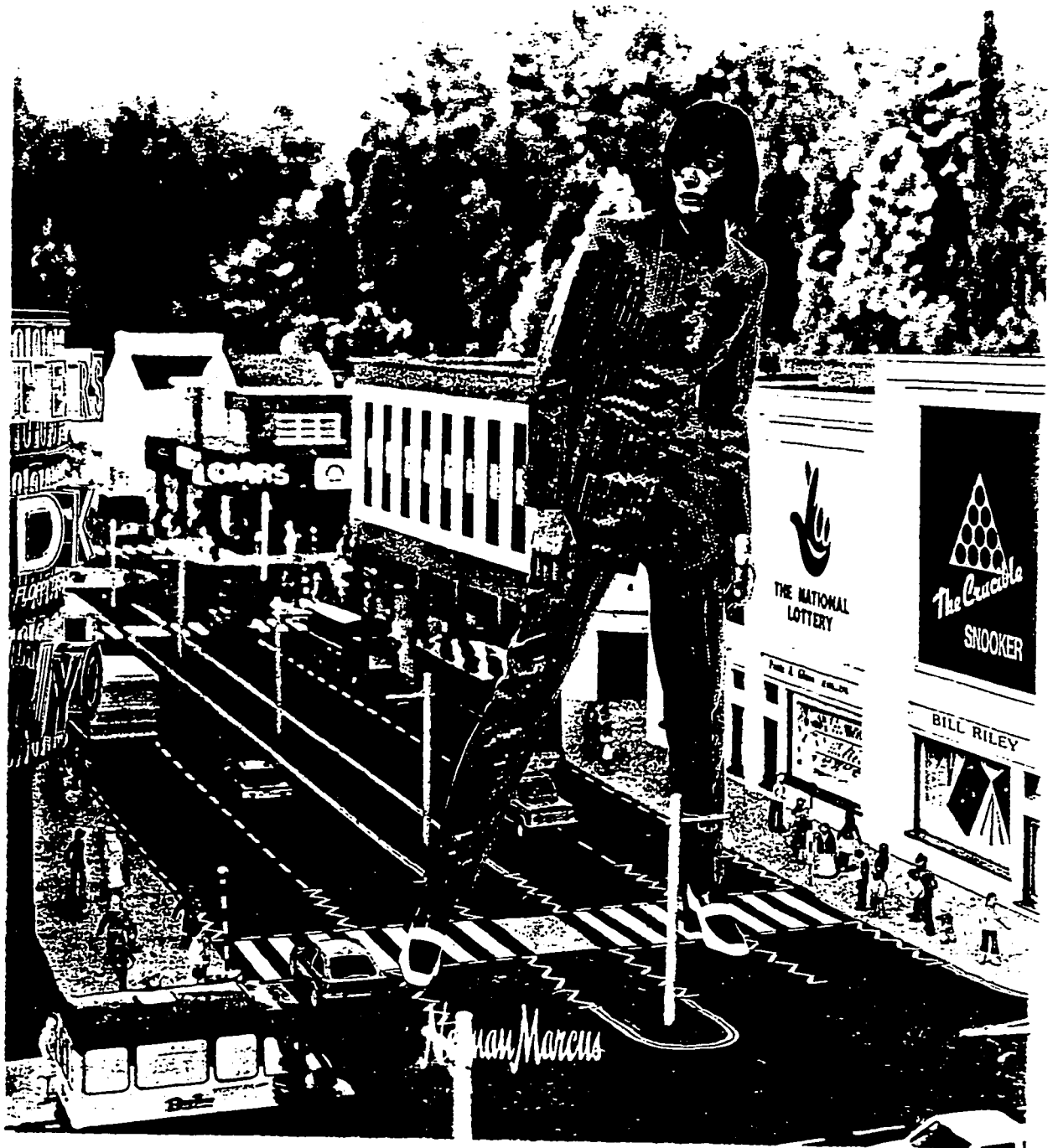


Figure 19: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 21: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 22: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

YVES SAINT LAURENT FIVE GAUCHE



Figure 23: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

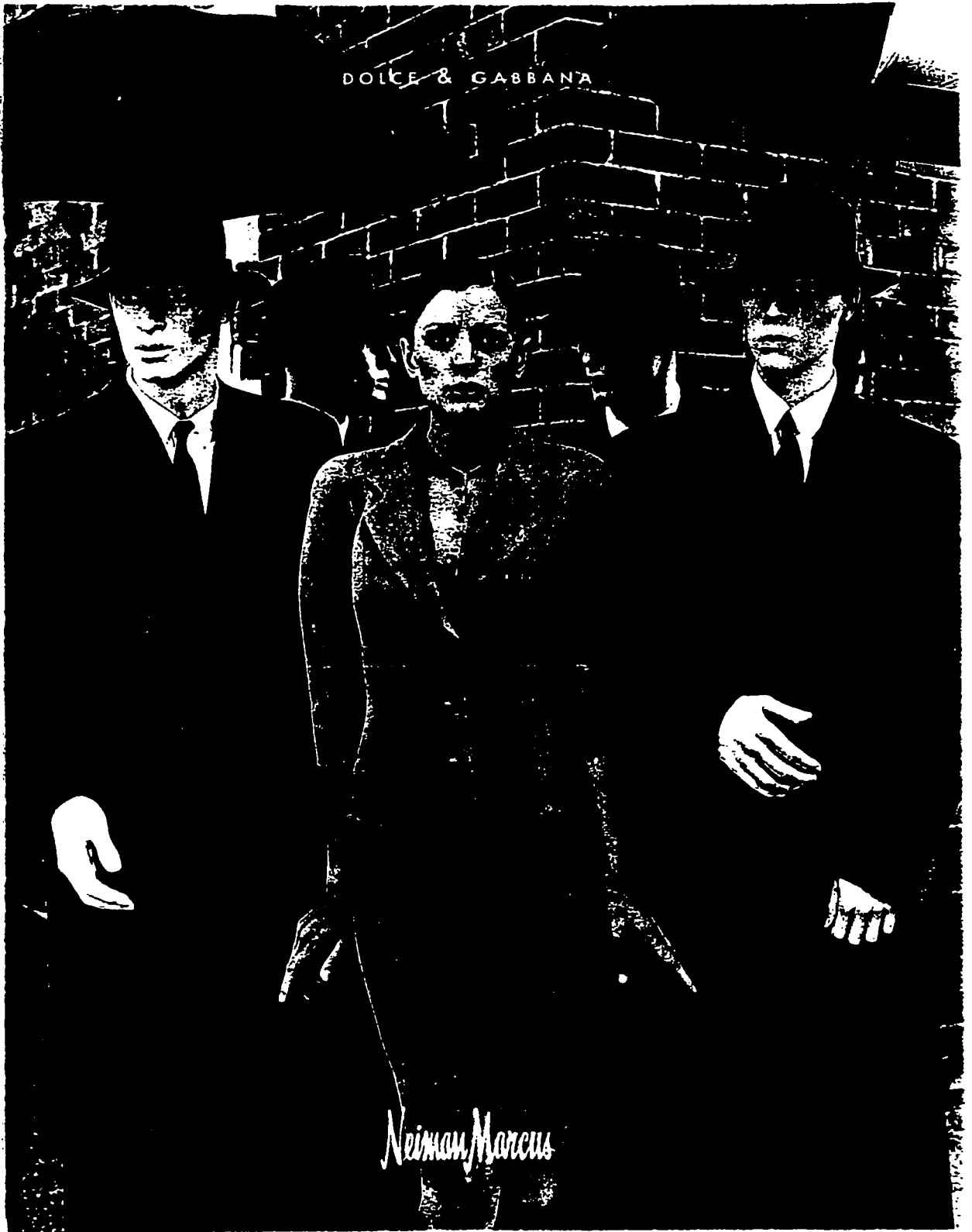


Figure 24: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.





Figure 25: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

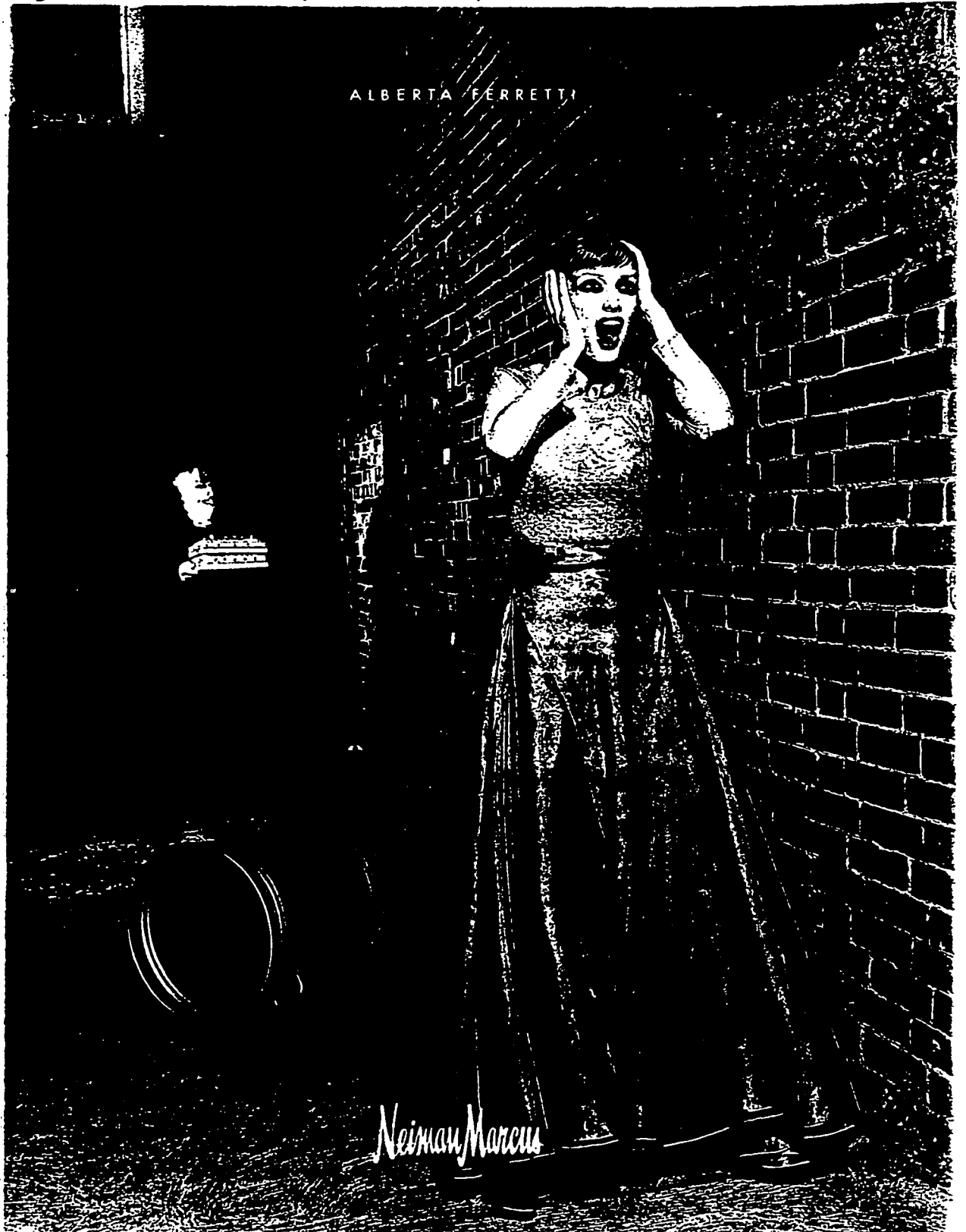


Figure 26: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

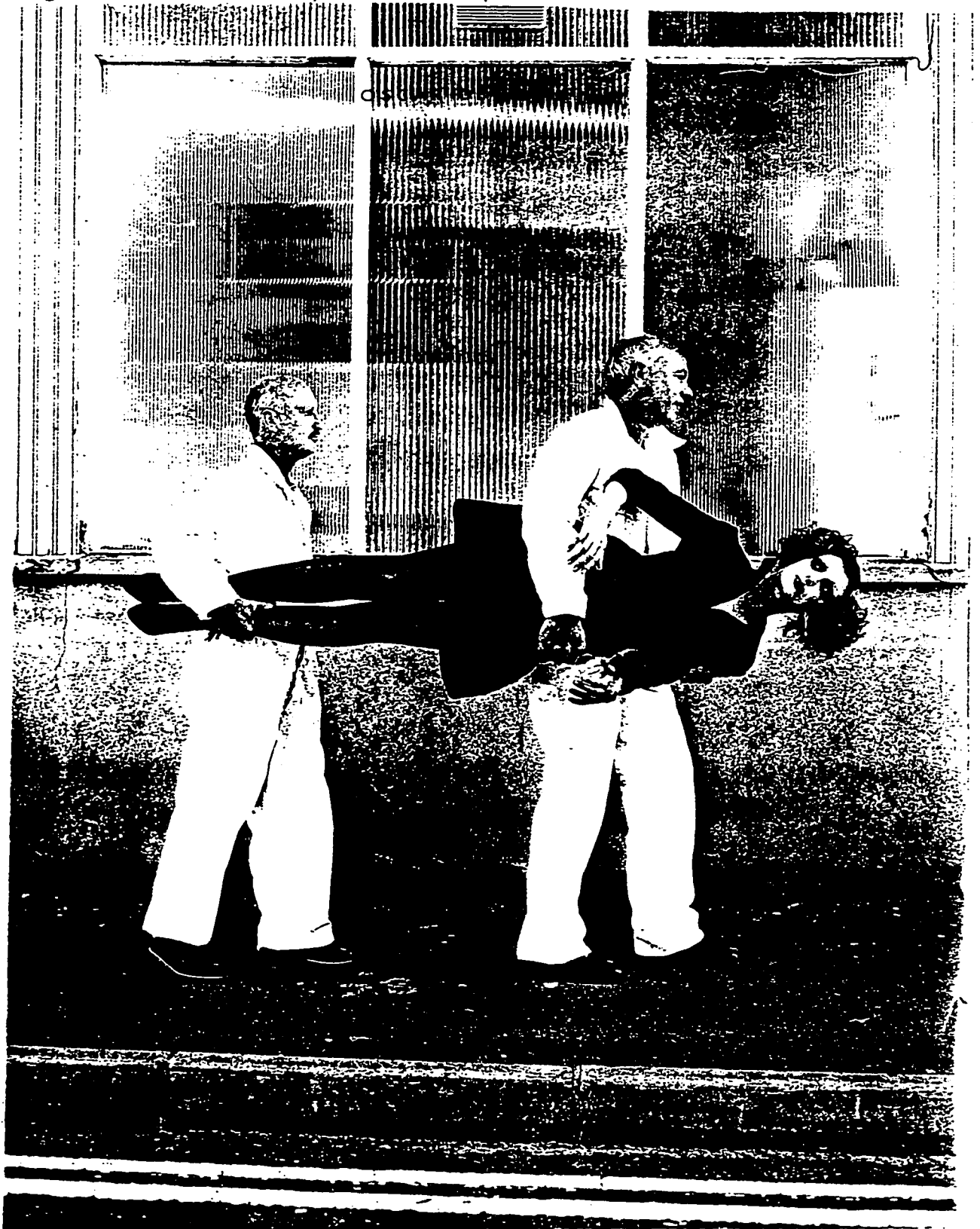


Figure 27: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.



Figure 28: Geof Kern, *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1995.

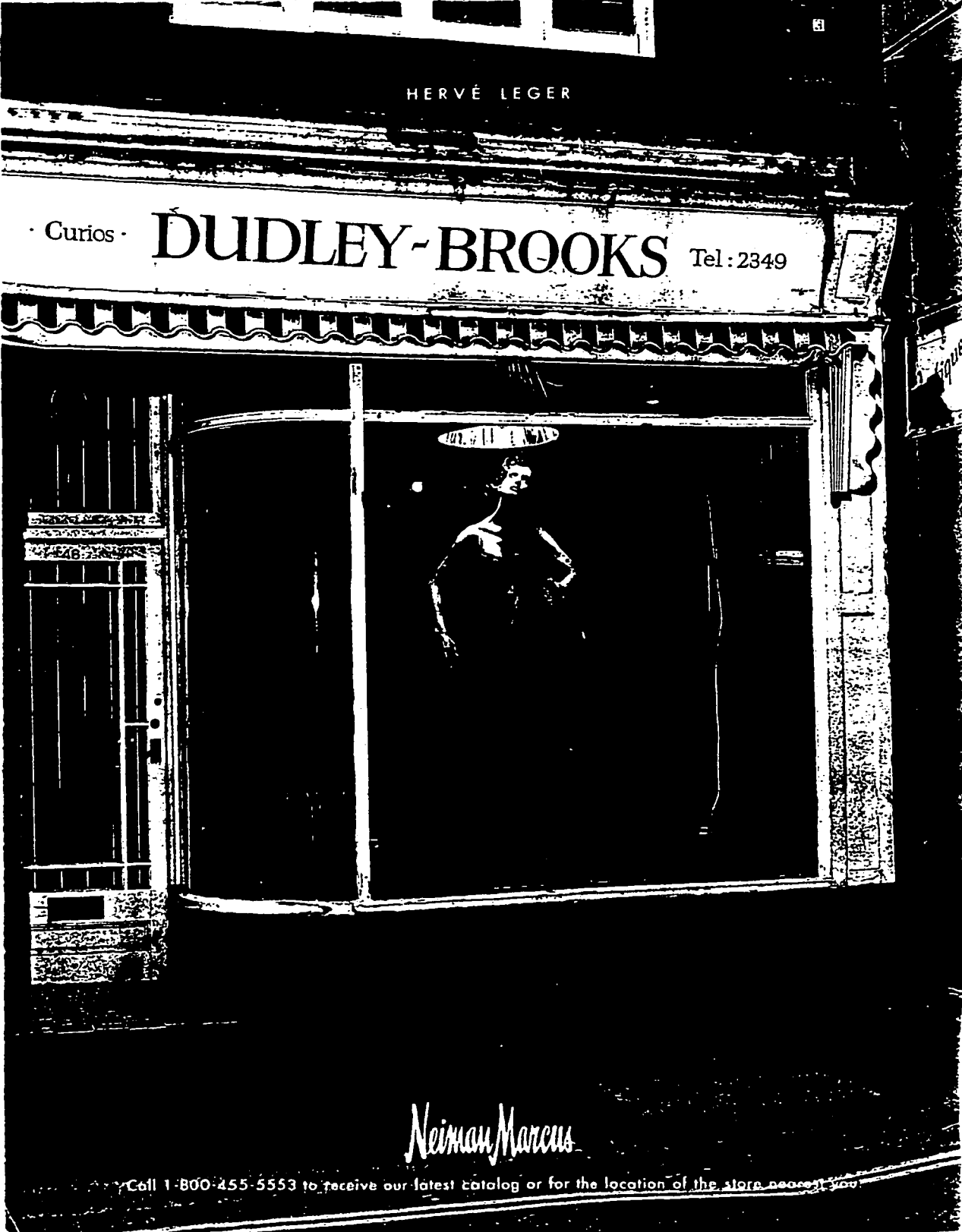


Figure 29: Annie Leibowitz, "The Art of Fashion" in *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 30: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 31: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

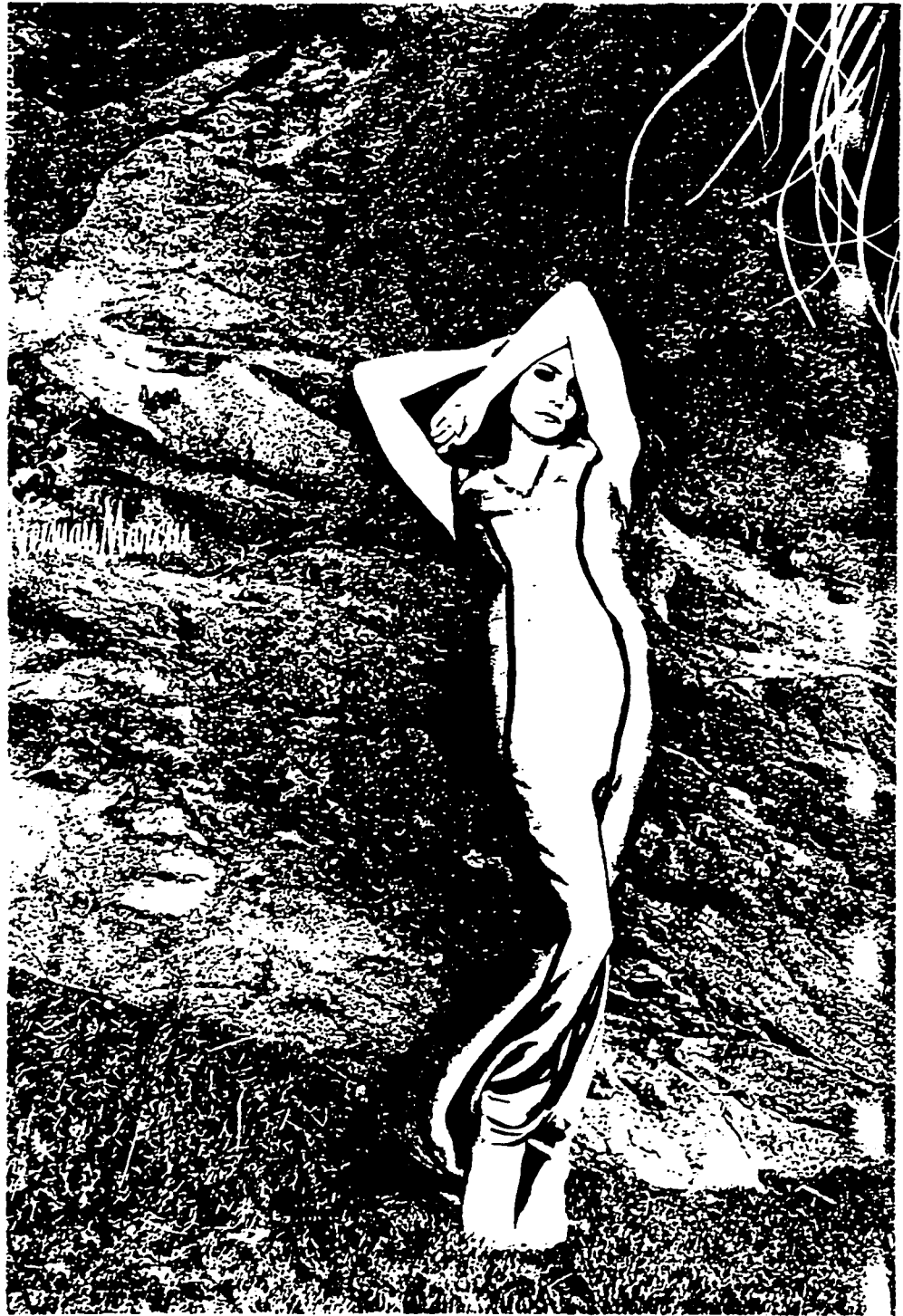


Figure 32: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

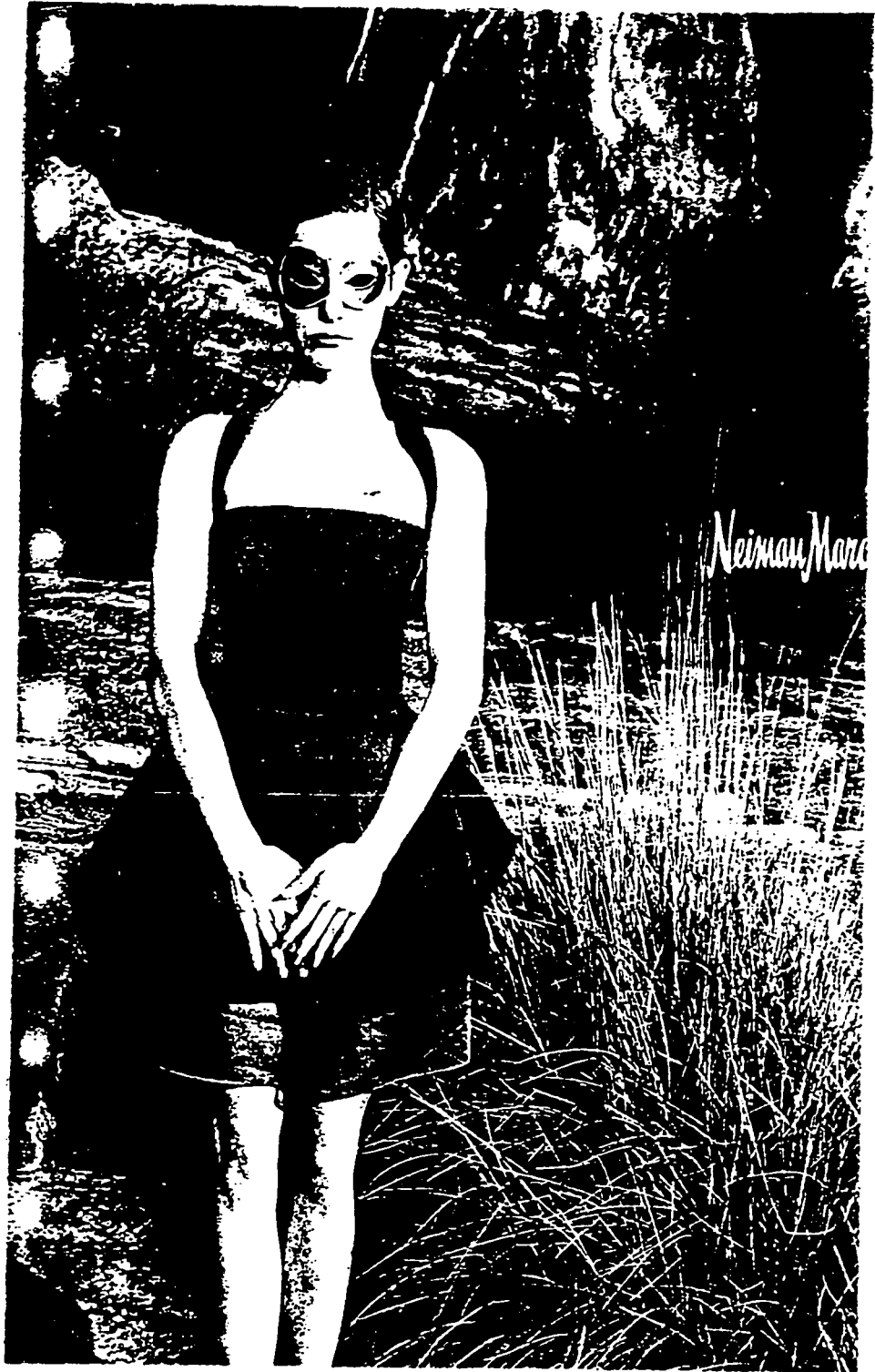




Figure 33: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 34: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

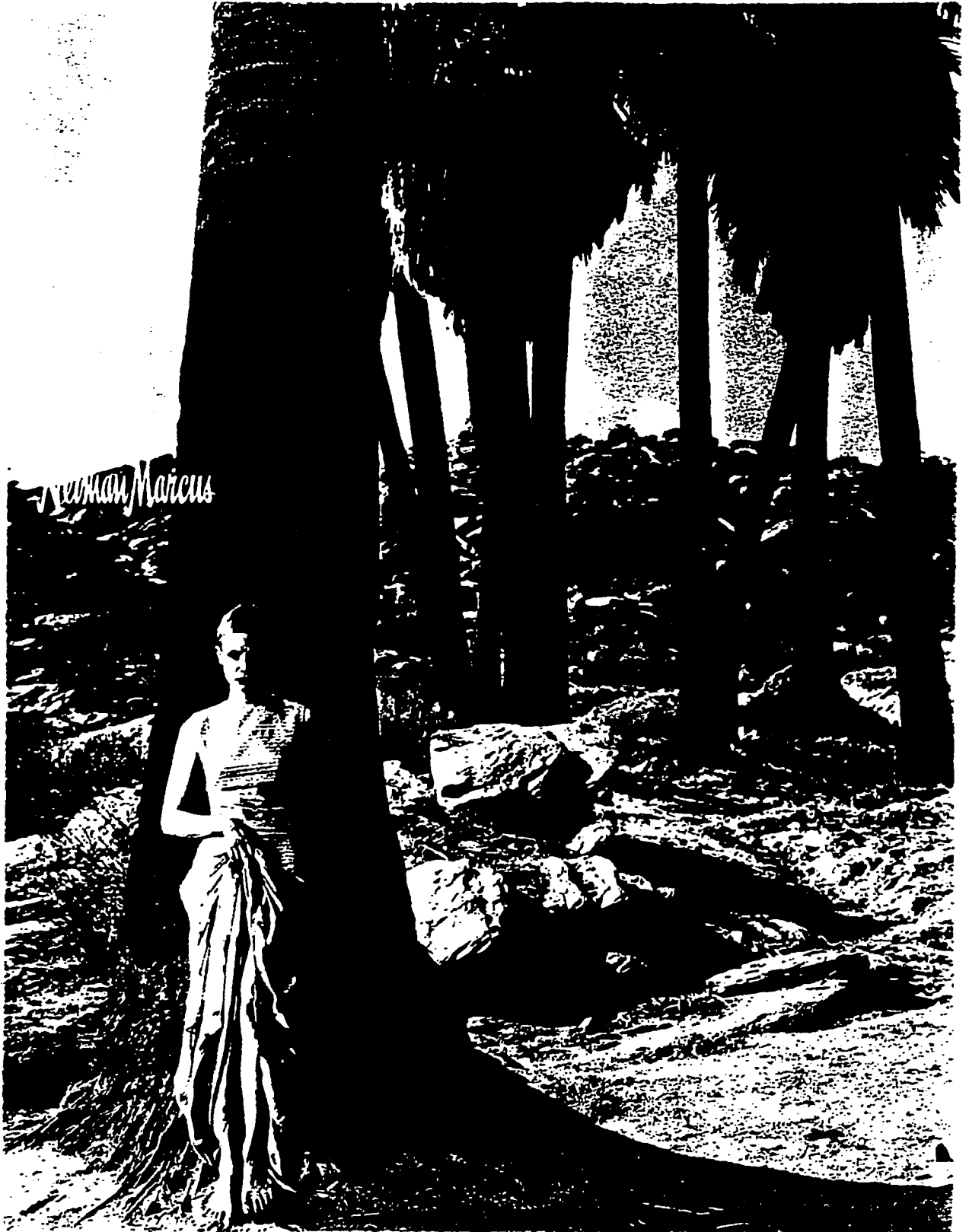


Figure 35: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 36: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 37: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



alberta ferretti

Neiman Marcus

Figure 38: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 39: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

emanuel ungaro parallele



Figure 40: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

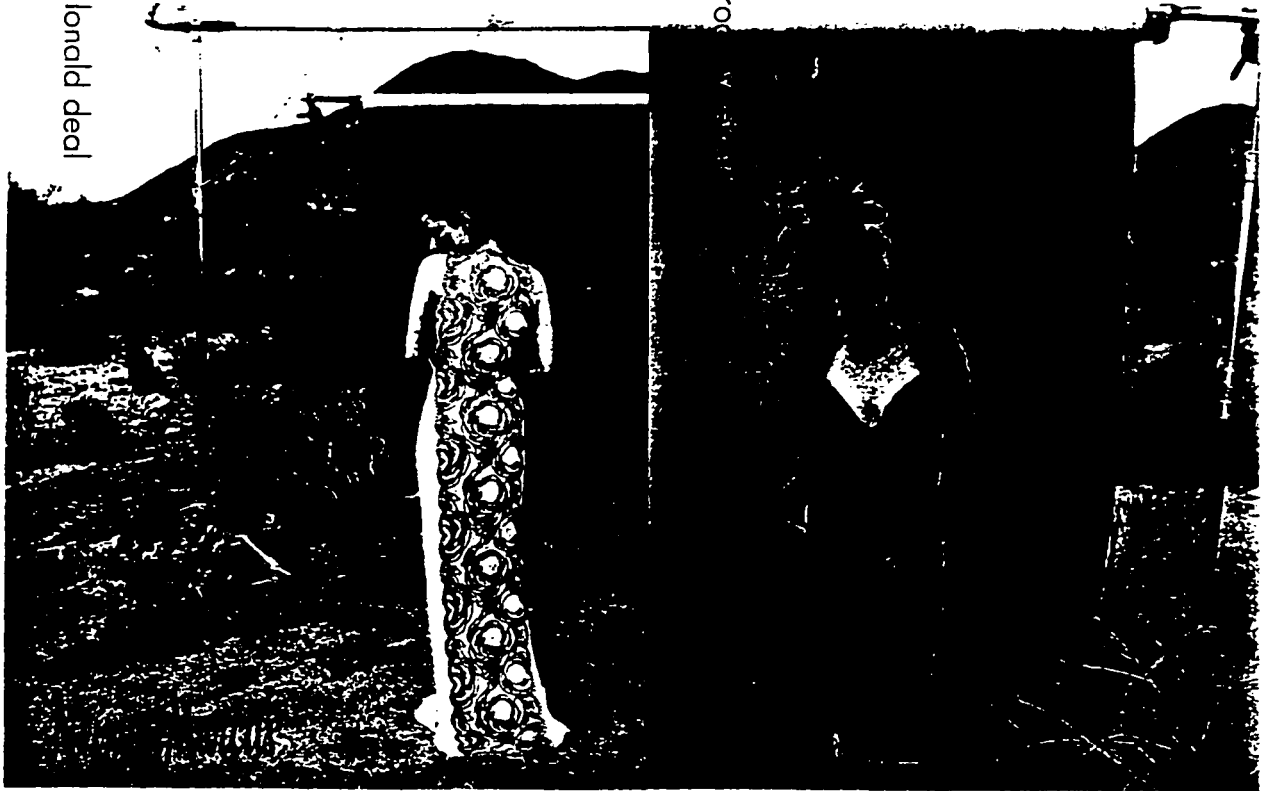




Figure 41: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

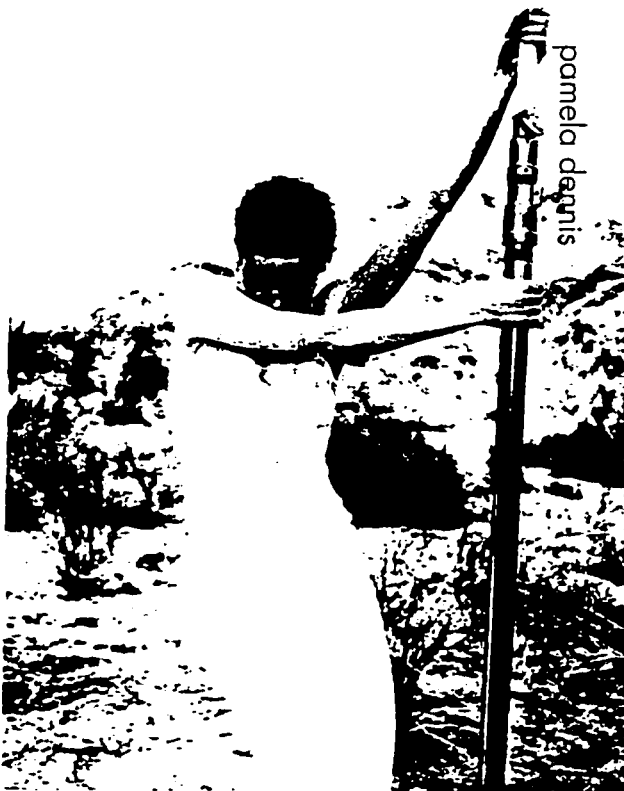
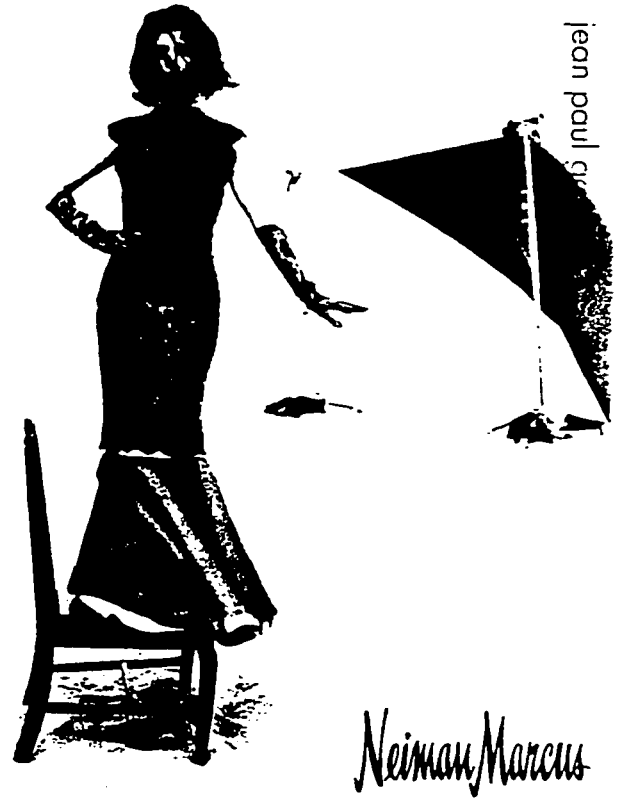


Figure 42: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 43: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 44: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

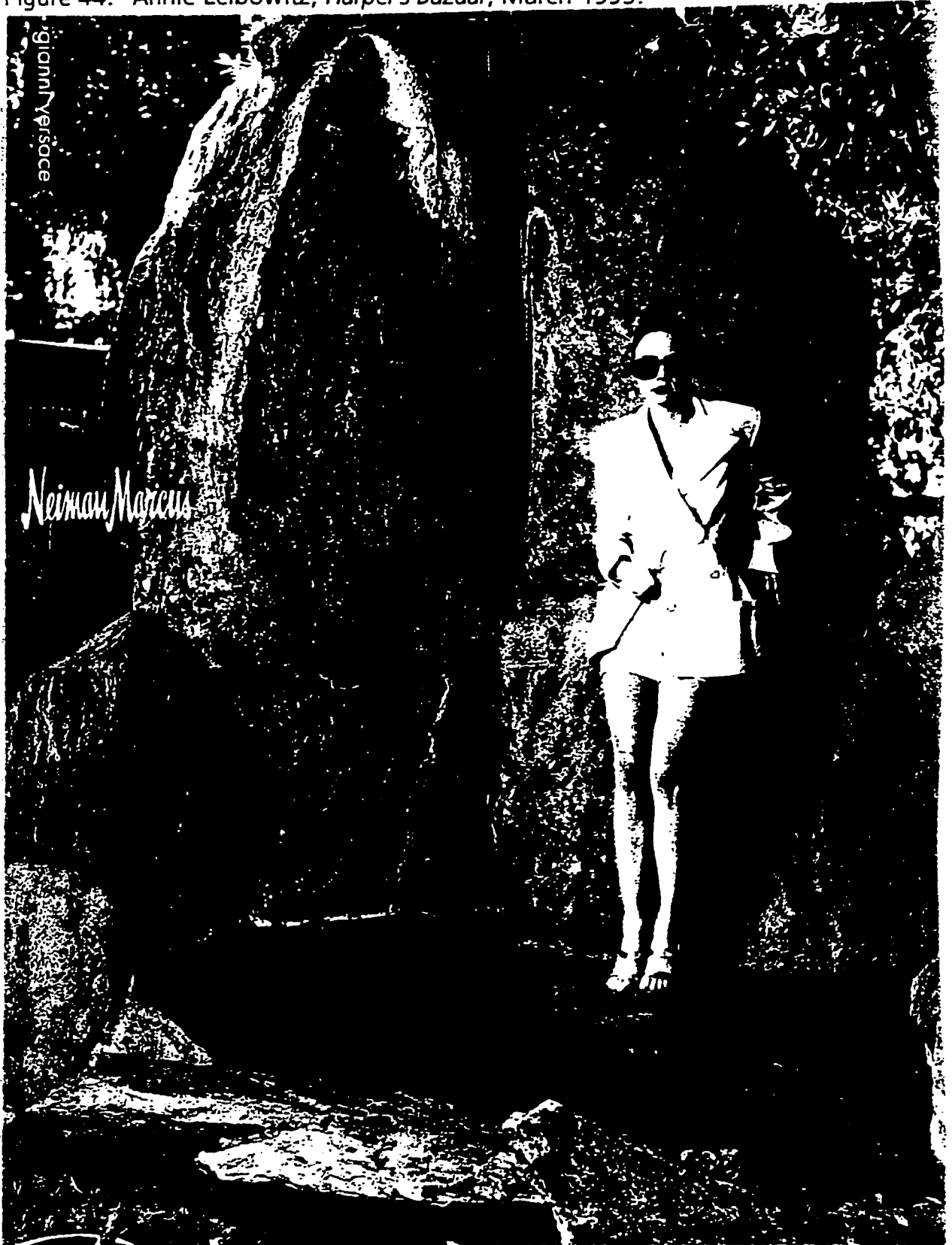


Figure 45: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 46: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

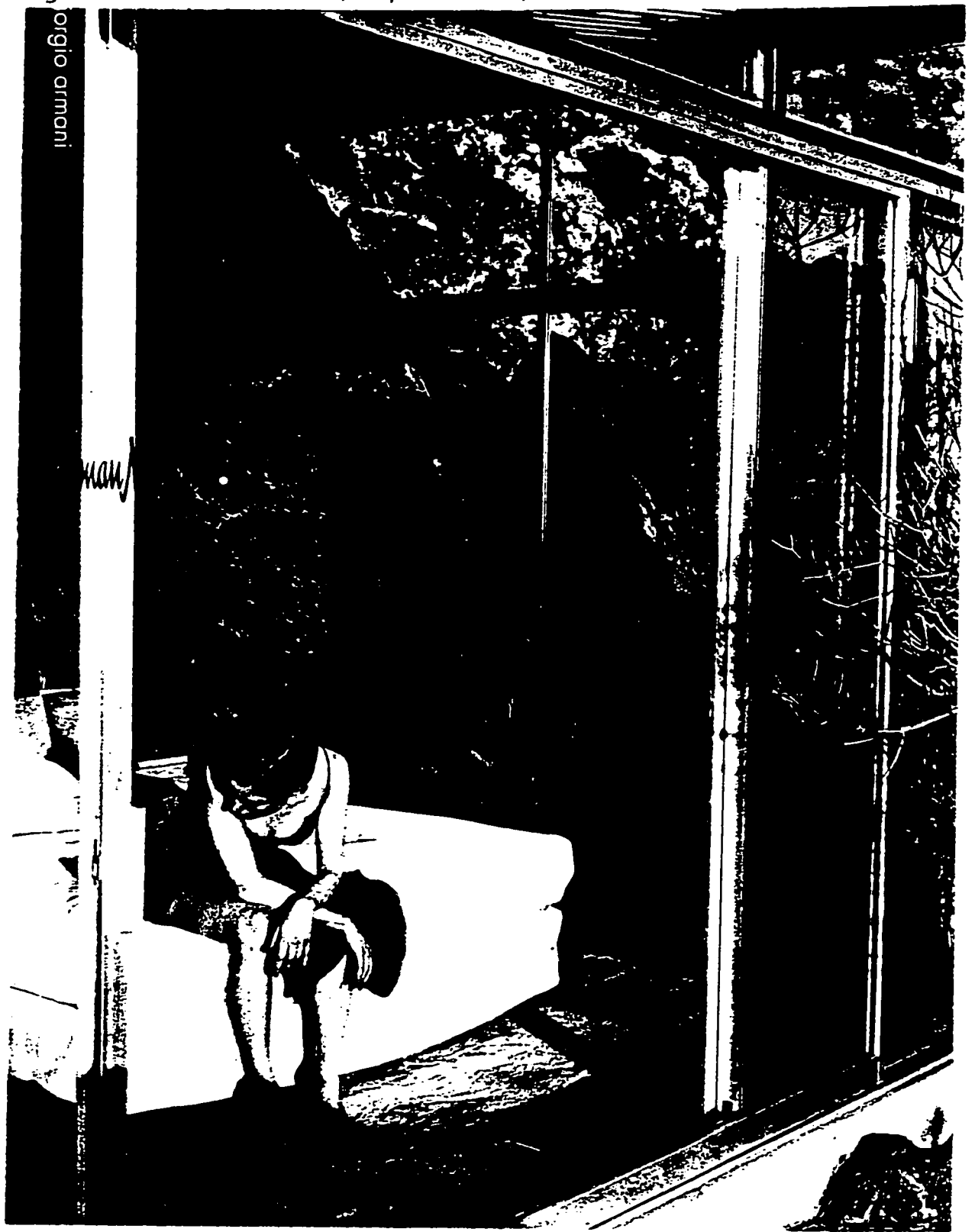


Figure 47: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

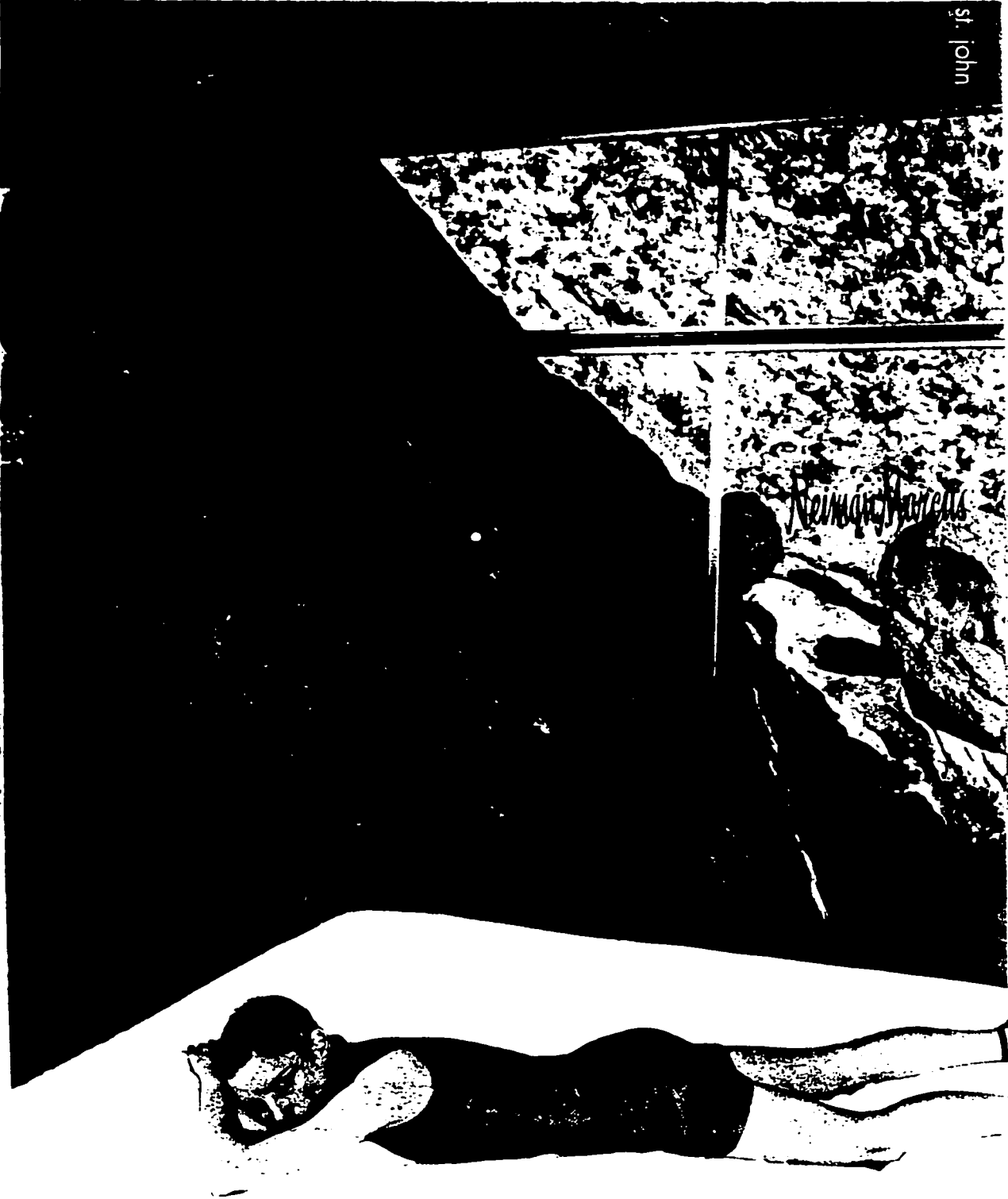


Figure 48: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

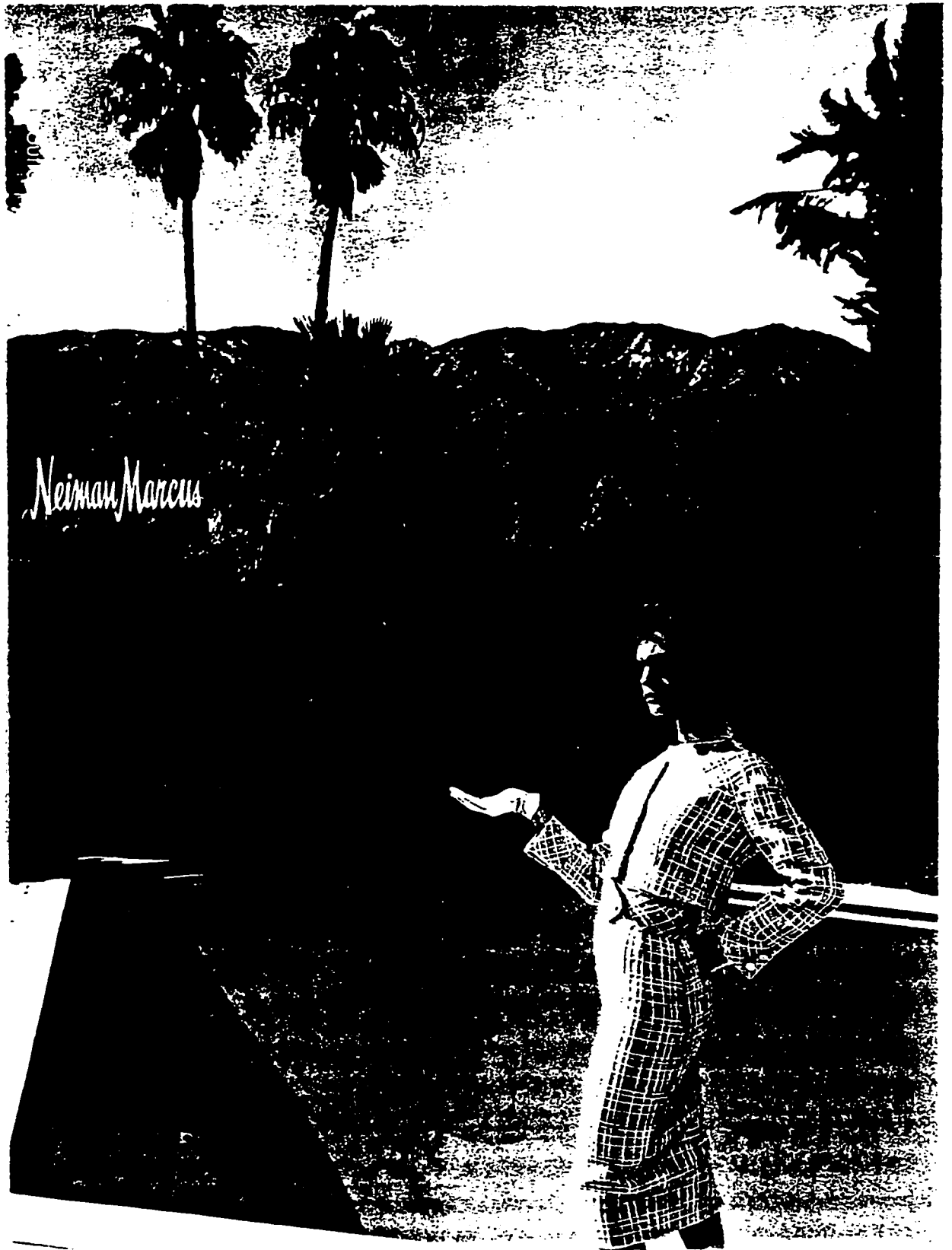




Figure 49: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 50: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 51: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

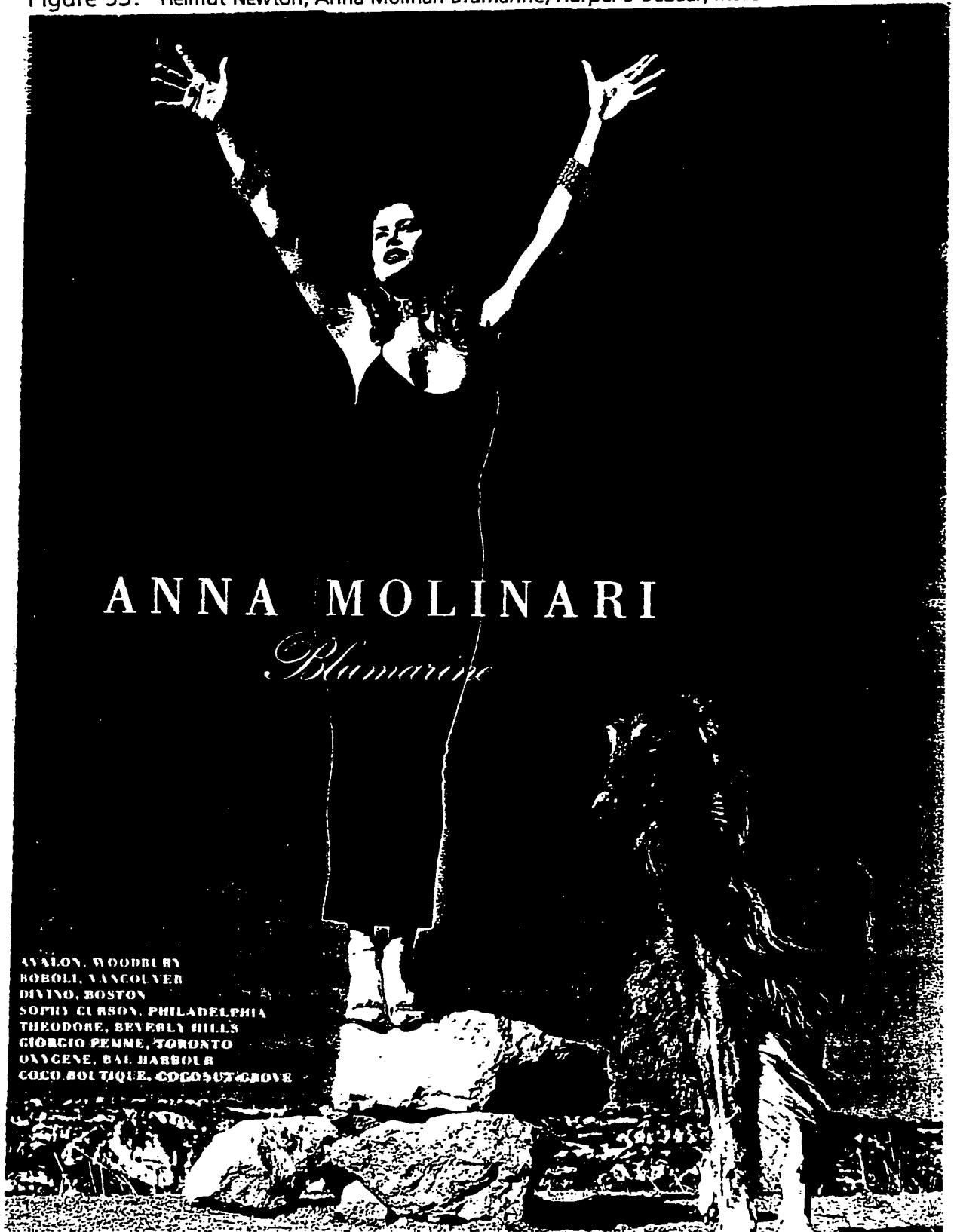


Figure 52: Annie Leibowitz, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

issey miyake



Figure 53: Helmut Newton, Anna Molinari *Blumarine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



# ANNA MOLINARI

*Blumarine*

AVALON, WOODBURY  
BOBOLI, VANCOUVER  
DIVINO, BOSTON  
SOPHY GIBSON, PHILADELPHIA  
THEODORE, BEVERLY HILLS  
GIORGIO PENNE, TORONTO  
OXYGENE, BAL HARBOUR  
COCO BOUTIQUE, COCOSUT GROVE

Figure 54: Helmut Newton, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.



Figure 56: Helmut Newton, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995.

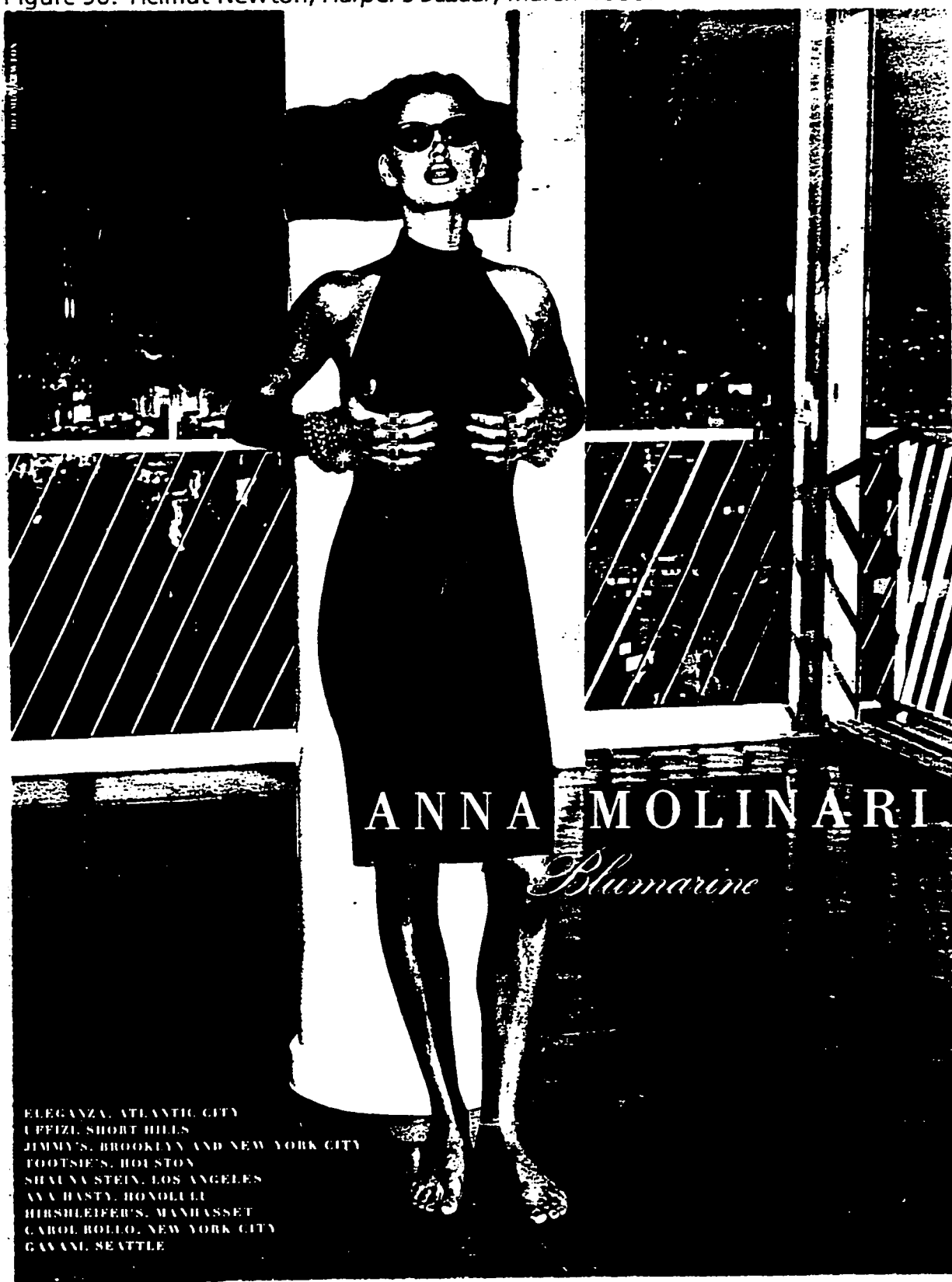


Figure 55: Helmut Newton, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1995





Figure 57: Francesco di Giorgio, *Colonna stolata*, c. 1840. [George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Ornament: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1988, pp. 81.]



Figure 58: Nathaniel Goldberg, "Swim at Your Own Risk," in *Harper's Bazaar*, June 1996.

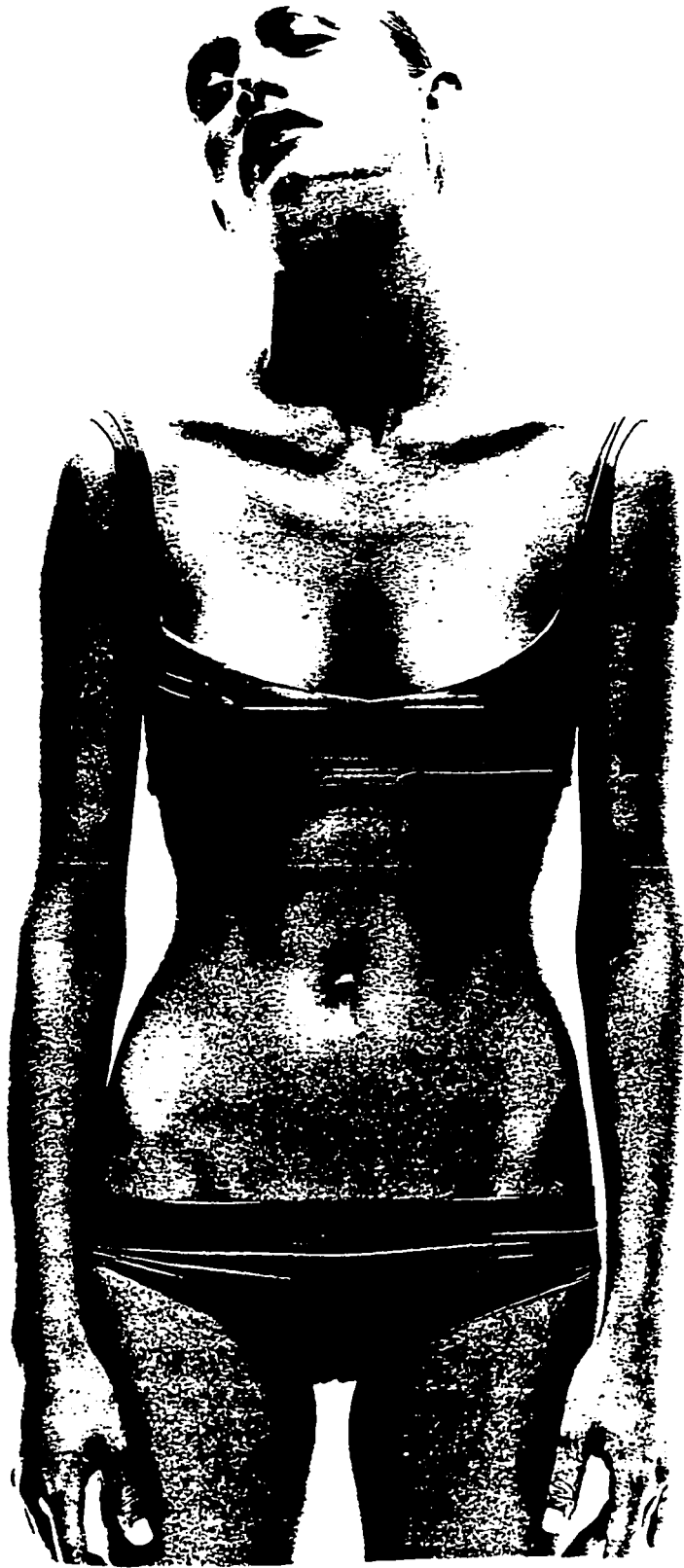


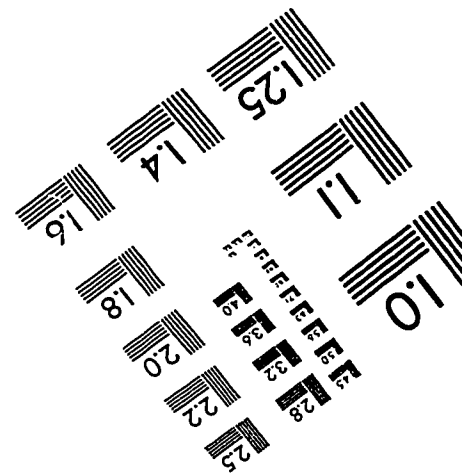
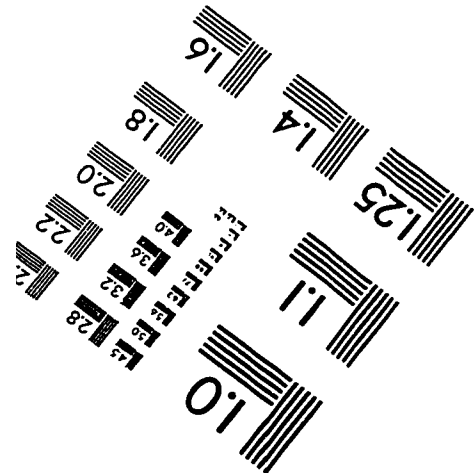
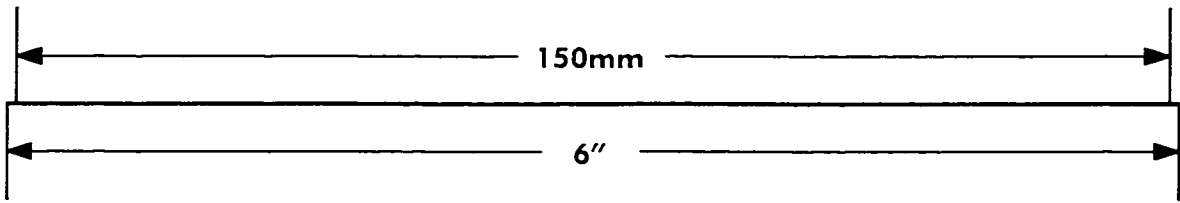
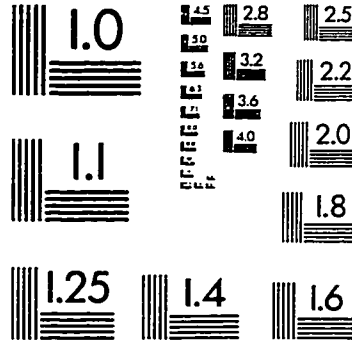
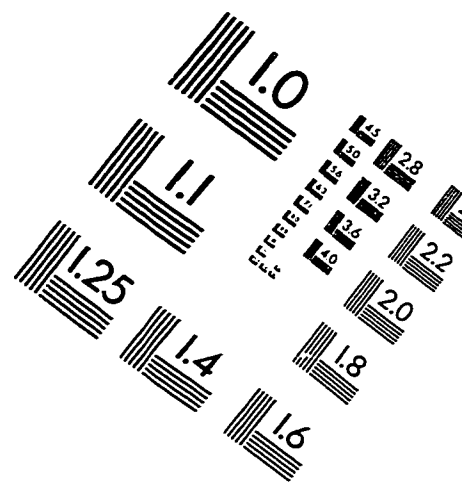
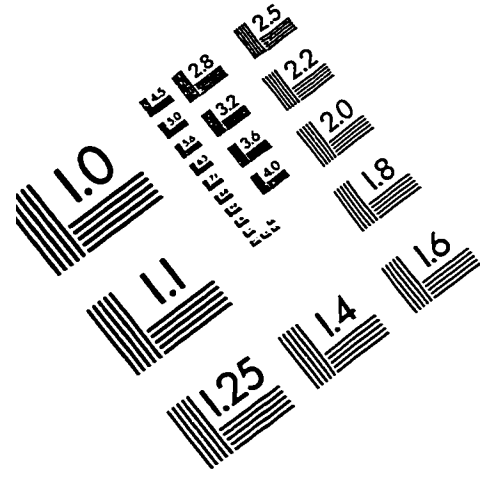
Figure 59: Raymond Meier, "The Furs," in *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1995.



Figure 60: Floria Sigismond. *Shift*, June 1996.



# TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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