The Beauty of Inclusivity: “Visual Activism” from Social Media to Fashion Magazines

The Beauty of Inclusivity: "Visual Activism" from Social Media to Fashion Magazines

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ABSTRACT | *This article investigates the role of fashion and beauty photography in contemporary social discourses of inclusion and diversity, contributing to a critique of traditional politics of representation of the body and, therefore, to sociocultural change. Starting from analyzing this complex phenomenon that has generated a ground for comparison between ethic and aesthetic practices, snapshot culture, and advertising, Pompa examines how the rise of social media put into crisis the now leading aesthetic standards. In fact, these media have pointed out the need to increase the representation on fashion magazines of minorities, who have until now been excluded in the mainstream media. In this perspective, Vogue Italia and related narratives of unconventional beauty are explored.*

KEYWORDS | *inclusion and diversity, unconventional beauty, social media, fashion photography, Vogue Italia*

Introduction

Over the last decade, the world of fashion and beauty communication has been at the center of an epochal change. The editorial policies of traditional fashion magazines are starting to move, although still slowly, in the direction of inclusion. Increasingly socially engaged, fashion magazines are gradually opening up to the visual representation of those excluded from the "social stage." The lenses of both established and emerging photographers increasingly focus on imperfect faces, curvy bodies, disabled physiques, fluid identities, educating our gaze to overcome its limitations and include otherness. I believe that this cultural climate is rooted in extending the "field of the photographable" and, therefore, of what is visible,

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which is taking place on social media and laying the foundations for a radical change of pace in the representation of the body.[1] On the one hand, these platforms are witnessing a paradoxical recrudescence of old, highly "exclusive" beauty standards; on the other hand, the normalization of the inclusion of divergent bodies from those usually presented in the dominant visual narratives is gaining ground. As Patrizia Calefato noted: "The direct and personal contact with the media and messages that touch and pass through us, creates new social and cultural identities. The new communication technologies modify the definitions of corporeality in the social territory."[2]

The result is a new climate in which #nofilter movements have taken hold, praising an aesthetic of honesty and authenticity, condemning the so-called cosmetic surgery filter of Instagram. Consequently, projects such as #girlgaze were born, which since 2016 has been encouraging through an Instagram account to challenge restrictive codes of female beauty and dismantle visual clichés, as well as offering through a digital platform concrete job opportunities to emerging female-identifying photographers and filmmakers from Generation Z.[3] Agencies such as Zebedee were founded, which should be considered much more than just a modeling agency; in fact, it "is a specialist talent agency created to increase the representation of people who have until now been excluded in the media, including people with disabilities or alternative appearances and trans/nonbinary."[4] In addition, group exhibitions have been organized, such as Embracing Diversity, which took place at the Photo *Vogue* Festival 2018, inviting reflection on diversity in all its expressions: physical, gender, geographical, and cultural.[5] These initiatives testify to the urgent need for identity and expressive freedom on various social groups, who are less and less inclined to follow the ideals and body standards imposed by the mainstream media. This represents a change of perspective to which even traditional fashion magazines are adapting, as they have always been called upon to act as "referees of taste," not only in terms of clothing style but also in life and thought.

This article examines the role played by these magazines, which since the second half of the twentieth century have contributed to perpetuate body stereotypes and, consequently, to solidify unrealizable dreams of beauty, only to gradually undermine and deconstruct them, in the wake of a change introduced by the advent of social media in synergy with the democratization of photographic practice and the fourth-wave feminist

movement. In this respect, I specifically analyze *Vogue Italia*, which in the first two decades of the new millennium has been particularly inclined to promote an inclusive culture and an appreciation of diversity through covers, editorials, and photographic exhibitions that are contributing to redefine the iconography and aesthetic imagery of traditional fashion magazines.

The Progressive Demolition of the Beauty Dream Industry

Fashion imagery rarely reflects reality. More often, the covers, editorials, and advertising campaigns hosted by fashion magazines encourage an escape from it. In this process of escaping from real life, the photographic medium plays a central and prominent role, which we need to focus on before proceeding to explore the relationship between photography and the strategies adopted "to sell us dream-like visions of idealized beauty."[6]

In the field of fashion communication and publishing, the photographic medium is generally called upon to certify an imaginary dimension, often totally disengaged from the anchorages of everyday life, thus giving substance to a collective daydream.[7] As Francesca Alinovi points out in an essay dedicated to the nexus between photography and imaginary illusion, the medium does not possess an univocal identity, but a "double nature" characterizes it.[8] It can be used "not only as an impeccable medium for ascertaining the real, but also as an ideal means for escaping into the unreal."[9] In other words, the status of documentary evidence—that is commonly attributed to photographic images—can generate "the curious result that anything photographed, regardless of its realness, becomes immediately true simply because it has been photographed," even when the reality that stood in front of the camera has been falsified *ad hoc*.[10] The ability of the medium to automatically produce an exact and objective copy of reality has, in fact, attributed to photographic images credibility status, or certification of truthfulness, to the point that what is transferred onto them is always assumed and experienced as real by the observer.[11] Throughout the last century and up to the present day, this status has therefore been effectively exploited in the field of fashion communication to give credibility to illusory escapes into parallel worlds,[12] into which female magazine readers have been able to project themselves. Ultimately, it should be noted that this imaginary dimension, solidified through the photographic medium, is

a distinctive feature of this publishing branch, which is constantly striving to veil reality "under the shadows of a dream."[13]

In this perspective, fashion photography does not just suggest new products to buy but becomes the main engine of a "dream industry." The ever-changing concept of "dream" acquires a specific meaning in the advertising environment. It refers to the idealized version of our inspirations,[14] which acquires significance through the printed page. As Lucia Ruggerone pointed out, "Unlike the advertising of other products, which often tends to reproduce traditional and shared models and behaviours, fashion images are idealisations, visual representations of a world of unsatisfied desires, some sort of crystallisation of possible aspirations, not always conscious and confessable."[15] In this light, photographic images offer their consumers material to identify with, even though to a lesser extent than film images.[16] Especially during the last century, photographers in this field have in fact ridden and fed a trend already in place in Western art, consciously directed toward separation and distance from reality or its sublimation,[17] striving to preserve a differentiation, perhaps minimal but inevitable, between the world and its transference on the printed page. Consequently, flipping through women's magazines provides access to a dimension as artificial as alternative, often far from everyday life. In other words, in most cases, photographic images solidify a highly desirable imaginary world, into which the reader can project herself, identifying with the models and their fictitious lifestyle, even before identifying with their clothing style. In the female audience's perception, it is then created a bridge between the fictional world presented by images and a potentially achievable lifestyle to aspire. Therefore, advertising, especially in the fashion and beauty industry, has a high persuasive power: the visual imagery creates an atmosphere that stimulates the consumer's imagination, promising that they can adhere to the lifestyle depicted in the image space through the purchase of the product.[18]

However, advertising promise offers more than just this illusion. Fashion covers, editorials, and advertising campaigns also have a high shaping power. They set reference standards to define one's body image. As several psychological studies have pointed out,[19] the traditional media spreads specific values and standards of feminine beauty that women perceive as norms to judge their physical appearance or guide principles in shaping their body. And, in this system, fashion magazines play a decisive role. As Diana Crane's analysis of Vogue USA shows,[20] from the 1960s onward, the focus of fashion

imagery shifted from clothing to the bodies of ever-younger models. In this period, the body became the main object to be exhibited and emphasized until it assumed a central role in the contemporary iconography of women's magazines. According to Roland Barthes,[21] in the second half of the twentieth century, it imposed a young and slender body type, to the point of it becoming the quintessential inhabitant of advertising. In a 1978 television interview with Teri Wehn Damisch, the French scholar said,

> It seems that our society only accepts young bodies. Whenever the cultural technique . . . takes over the body, be it in advertising, cinema or photography, what is staged, what is allowed is always a young body, as if the individual is only seen in the guise of an immortal being. . . . In modern society, there is what I would not hesitate to call a kind of youth racism, in the sense that young people, youth, are treated by society as a kind of race, from which, of course, one is excluded from the moment one is no longer young. This is perfectly legible in a myth that also has a fundamental, current commercial substratum: the myth of the thin body. The thin body is assimilated to a young body; thinness is a guaranteed sign of youth, hence the extraordinary development of slimming techniques, the extraordinary preoccupation and obsession that the desire to lose weight represents in today's world . . . the modern body is wanted to be massively, collectively, mythically a thin and young body.[22]

In the same vein, Saveria Capecchi argued that the predominant female body type in the media contributes to the ideal of slenderness, along with the myth of eternal youth.[23] In this sense, in the opinion of the Italian scholar, the body type par excellence is, therefore, that of the fashion model. Returning to the specific field of fashion advertising, the body Barthes and Capecchi describe was regularly incubated—and often still is—in the pages of women's magazines. In fact, the first models with a "personality" that emerged on the scene in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the supermodels of the 1980s and 1990s nurtured a homogeneous body type that, in most cases, adhered to Western ideals of beauty.[24] As Ruggerone argued, it is fascinating to observe how fashion photography, on the one hand, proposes continuous style changes, while on the other, elaborates, spreads, and consolidates an unrealistic body type that does not change

as the seasonal clothing collections do. "Body thinness is proposed as an unquestionable standard, implicitly denying alternative possibilities of expression to women who do not conform to the standard."[25] In addition, the "perfect body" presented by such magazines is not only unrealistic. It is not only shaped on an abstract and idealized type that excludes diversity in terms of age, physical appearance, race or gender. Besides denying the existence of different beauty types, it is mainly displayed as a sexual object of male desire. It is then represented according to an objectifying point of view, peculiar to that male gaze, theorized by film critic Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*.[26]

To summarize: in parallel to the focus shift from clothing to the bodies of young, thin female models, since the 1970s, there has been "a tendency to charge fashion images with sexual meanings and implications."[27] As a result, traditional fashion iconography has favored the spread of unrealistic beauty standards, partly the result of a male vision of femininity, which has become predominant in our culture, even modeling how women look at themselves.[28] However, the last few decades have seen a considerable change, encouraged by the rise of social networks, which establish themselves as an alternative platform to traditional media in elaborating and disseminating an inclusive beauty ideal.

By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, fashion and beauty advertising began to see a substantial change, as the editorial policies of traditional magazines started to make efforts to respond to the global desire for diversity and inclusion.[29] In fact, they started to explore and valorize diversity from a physical appearance, age, race, and gender perspective, shifting the limits of visible and expanding them to infinite gazes, not only to the male one. As a result, in recent years, the cover stories, editorials, and advertising campaigns published in traditional fashion magazines have given the impulse to extend their "field of the photographable."[30] This change has been linked by both scholars and professionals to the practices of photographic self-representation implemented on social media by users and frequently stimulated by activist groups belonging to so-called fourth-wave feminism. The cultural revolution triggered by the digital turn and the internet has, in fact, intensified the link between feminist movements and the media.[31] As an example of this, Instagram is increasingly being used in many activist initiatives and related campaigns to promote diversity and inclusion. It should be emphasized that the collectives

belonging to the different "waves" have always had a dynamic relationship with the media of their time: "from the first protests for women's votes to the most recent mobilizations against gender-based violence or for LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) rights."[32] However, compared to the mass media, social media have facilitated the organization of protests and, at the same time, granted them narrative autonomy, thus offering new potentials that have encouraged their use.

If we observe the phenomenon from the technological perspective, we might, in fact, consider these platforms as the embodiment of the so-called self-media prophesied in 1980 by Alan Toffler,[33] whose circulation within the social structure would have allowed the various users to manage communication as protagonists, transforming them from consumers into "prosumers" (a neologism resulting from the crasis between producer and consumer). On the other hand, how could we deny that potentially all social network users, even before being consumers, are textual, visual, and audio-visual content producers? Consequently, if the mass media helped to feed and perpetuate unrealistic beauty ideals introjected by entire generations of women, social media are helping to eradicate these ideals and convey a culture of equality and enhancement of the right to diversity. In both cases, they have mainly used photographic images. Activists, supporters, or simply sympathisers are increasingly using social networking platforms to intervene on topics such as beauty, body positivity, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and mental health issue, which are considered to be at the core of the fourth-wave feminist movement, characterized by a strongly intersectional approach.[34]

In addition, the use of such technologies is gradually making it possible to connect entire communities or social groups across cultural and national boundaries, reaching and raising awareness among a much wider public than was possible in the past.[35] In fact, social media users are increasingly adopting hashtags strategically spread by various movements, thus fluidizing the protest into daily life. For example, the hashtag #fatacceptance is now used daily to accompany self-portraits shared on Instagram by young women claiming the right not to be discriminated against because of their physical appearance, even if they are not directly involved in the body positivity movement. It follows that on Instagram, alongside the traditional fashion photographs published on the accounts of various brands or traditional fashion magazines, it is possible to come across portraits or

self-portraits published by emerging young photographers as well as ordinary users who are helping to challenge the Western beauty ideals that are still prevalent. Although it should be pointed out that many social media users continue to try to adhere to these ideals when representing themselves through smartphone cameras, at the same time, one cannot ignore a radical change in the way the female body is represented.

Thus, in conjunction with the success of "beautification features" aligned with the traditional aesthetic standards capable of influencing younger generations' self-esteem and body image,[36] an opposite tendency is currently spreading on Instagram and TikTok. Claiming the right to represent a non–artificially manipulated reality, this trend has banned so-called cosmetic surgery filters,[37] making room for *digital Selves* in direct contrast to the dominant excellence and beauty standards. Avatars with bodies undergoing slimming treatments with a single click via the app have thus been joined by new digital identities, visually reflecting the need for self-expression, inclusion, authenticity, respect for diversity both front of and behind the camera. For example, the hashtags #bodypositive or #blackisbeautiful collect millions of posts containing photographic portraits and self-portraits that challenge unrealistic beauty standards usually spread by the mainstream media. Therefore, the legitimacy of different canons of beauty has taken hold on social media, often encouraged by a female gaze that embraces the feminine universe in its infinite complexity without necessarily objectifying or eroticizing it. However, it is not only the traditional aesthetic canons that guide the representation of women and their bodies that are challenged. In parallel, a counternarrative is emerging in opposition to prejudices and taboos that have led to the exclusion of certain people from official narratives based on their age, sex, sexual orientation, race, religious beliefs, ethnicity, social class, and physical characteristics. The rise of social media, together with the democratization of the photographic practice due to the camera phone,[38] have thus offered self-representation and identity construction tools even to those who were generally excluded from the stereotypical narratives proposed by the mainstream media. In fact, it is undeniable that these tools have facilitated the emersion process of individual subjectivity, to the point of constituting a viaticum for a potential redemption of a pluralist gaze, which does not exclude but instead includes diversity, normalizing it. Last, it should be emphasized that the spread of the camera incorporated in a smartphone

constantly connected to the Internet, and thus to the social media, has provided users with an unparalleled tool and space for experimentation with identity. In everyday photographic practice of the last decades, the camera has, in fact, ceased to be first and foremost a memory support tool to become an instrument of ascertainment, reappropriation, and representation of the body and the Self. Technological innovations have ultimately favored the democratization of its use and functions, which in the past were consciously exploited mainly in the artistic sphere. By way of example, it is undeniable that today this medium is increasingly being used, as the feminist artists of the 1970s, to authenticate one's identity on an aesthetic level and, perhaps, cease to be the object of others' vision and desire.[39]

This phenomenon undoubtedly influenced, from below, various cultural and creative industry fields—first of all, the fashion communication sector. As pointed out by Ruxandra Looft,[40] the conjuncture between feminism, photography, and social media has undoubtedly contributed to determining an inclusive turn in arts and popular culture. This point of view is echoed—as argued below—in the statements of fashion industry professionals such as Alessia Glaviano, Senior Photo Editor of *Vogue Italia*.

Toward Change: Vogue Italia as an Example of Openness to Diversity

Apart from the few exceptions to a communicative practice essentially locked in its conventions and respectful of its taboos, throughout the twentieth-century traditional fashion magazines remained devoted to a visual narrative that rarely adhered to reality in terms of both the atmospheres and the bodies presented. Moreover, these magazines systematically avoided committed references to cultural, social, political or existential issues, using photo editorials to "celebrate the frivolous nature of appearances and a radiant image of femininity."[41] Intervening on the relationship between fashion publishing and reality on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *Vogue Italia*, in the April 2014 issue, Carlo Ducci writes:

> the relationship between fashion publishing and everyday reality is as controversial as it is inescapable. An obvious and fertile exchange, continuous and constant, a reciprocal nurturing that brings them closer together and moves them apart, following the dimension of dreams, an inalienable element of this editorial branch. . . . There are

> . . . situations that are rarely found in fashion magazines, in a sort of silent psychological embargo, or presumed incompatibility with the DNA of this section of publishing. Social issues, events such as disasters, wars or news stories are almost on principle left aside because they are too intense, connoting or conditioning the everyday.[42]

Thus, Ducci provides a precise analysis of the editorial policies of the traditional fashion magazine, emphasizing how they contributed to perpetuate that break from reality and the everyday life that feeds the dream dimension described in the previous paragraph. However, reading on, one learns that the article aims to highlight *Vogue Italia*'s propensity to go against the flow and address "even topics usually excluded from the scope of fashion magazines."[43] This tendency was recently remarked in an article by Chiara Bardelli Nonino, Photo Editor of *Vogue Italia*, published in the April 2020 issue and emblematically entitled *Questo Non è (Solo) Un Giornale Di Moda* (*This Is Not (Just) a Fashion Magazine*).[44] Unlike many sector magazines that still today exclude socially or politically committed content from their editorial plans, Bardelli Nonino wrote that "fashion, of course, will always remain in the foreground, but the magazine must be openly progressive and socially committed. For one simple reason: saying nothing is nevertheless a political gesture, one that is tantamount to accepting the *status quo*. And this is certainly not *Vogue*."[45]

Aiming to highlight how the magazine has been against the tide since the early decades of the twentieth century, the article traces some of the steps of Audrey Withers's work, making her a pioneer of this innovating approach. Withers was the Editor-in-Chief of *British Vogue* during the Second World War and promoter of a progressive approach, capable of pushing the magazine to overcome limits considered insurmountable until then. An example is Lee Miller's reportage on the conflict, published in the *British Vogue* June 1945 issue, the so-called Victory Number.[46] According to Bardelli Nonino, it is undeniable that over the years, the long-running magazine of Condé Nast has published covers, articles, and photo shoots also dedicated to hot current topics, telling how women's role in society has changed.

So, coming back to *Vogue Italia*, it is equally indisputable that it took a stand on several occasions through both textual and visual content on the same wavelength as the other national editions. An emblematic example is represented by Steven Meisel's photographic works, considered by Ducci

and Bardelli Nonino as the perfect interpreter of this divergent conduct concerning the *status quo*. Through the lens of Meisel, the magazine gave visibility to various topical issues, such as the addiction to cosmetic surgery among celebrities (July 2005 issue), the discrimination of black models (July 2008 issue), the spread of anorexia among top models, and the constant exclusion of models with curvy bodies from the printed page (July 2011 issue). These are just three examples of the issues the magazine dealt with, which have become a central part of the cultural and social debate of the last decade. However, despite the ethically committed and sometimes provocative position taken, in most cases, the photographic images used to voice topical issues are to be considered "aesthetically perfect," cloaked in a patina of glamour even when their secondary purpose is to denounce the atrocities of war.[47] The locations, the styling, the models, and the formal choices in Meisel's shots provide a sugarcoated view of reality and a stereotyped view of beauty. In fact, the physical appearance of the models depicted rarely challenges the Western beauty ideals, to which photo editors, casting directors, stylists, and photographers continue to conform. On the other hand, if one looks at all the covers of *Vogue Italia*—from 1964, the year of its foundation, to April 2021—they hardly ever feature portraits of models diverging from the peculiar bodily standards of traditional fashion magazine iconography. Moreover, if we exclude the covers of three issues of 2020—i.e., the April "white cover" without photographic content, the June cover with a stylized woman drawing and the September cover, which is unique in the history of *Vogue Italia*– only twenty-four covers of the remaining 719 issues available in the digital archive of the magazine feature black models (ten of which are from issues published between 2012 and 2020). In all other covers, the models portrayed are white, young and slender. Finally, only in two cases, we found portraits of mature women: Isabella Rossellini photographed by Steven Meisel on the June 2012 "Health Issue" cover; Lauren Hutton portrayed by Steven Klein on the October 2017 "Timeless Issue" cover.

This recognition reveals the existence of a double-track on which the magazine has moved. On the one hand, the tendency to offer visual content that, by not contemplating diversity, nourishes abstract and idealized body types, often immortalized in fantastic atmospheres or aesthetically distant from everyday life and capable of perpetuating the dream dimension. On the other, the tendency to address current issues, though using

photo shoots that often veil reality with a glamorous patina that a traditional fashion magazine cannot ignore, thus seeking a balance between aesthetic needs and ethical urgencies. This search for compromise can be seen in all the proposed examples that, despite the ambiguity dictated by their dual nature, have contributed to setting the basis for a unique project in the magazine's history regarding inclusive openness to diversity.

The reference is to the September 2020 issue, the result of a unique project by Creative Director Francesco Verdieri, which led to the realization of 100 covers dedicated to 100 people and their 100 stories. As stated in his editor's letter by Emanuele Farneti, Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue Italia*, for the first time, 100 portraits were taken in order to print 100 different covers for a single issue, each dedicated to a person who differs from the other 100 in physical appearance, age, gender, profession, and lifestyle.[48] In addition to iconic supermodels, top models *du jour*, actresses and up-and-coming talents, the covers include:

> Instagram stars such as Emily Ratajkowski and Paloma Elsesser. Actresses like Chloë Sevigny. Non-binary, genderless or transgender models, like Indya Moore, Juno Mitchell, or Cici Tamiz, on the frontline in the fight for LGBTQI+ rights. Black activists such as Bethann Hardison. And then again, the pioneers: Ugbad Abdi, the first to walk down a catwalk donning a hijab, or Precious Lee, the first plus-size model of color to appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. But also Cameron Russell and Trish Goff, both key figures in the #metoo movement. Asian model Ash Foo, back on the catwalk after undergoing chemotherapy. Models, activists, writers, photographers, and world-renowned artists such as Dominique Durosea, who explores racism, black feminism, and gender; the deputy director of New York's New Museum Karen Wong and star architect Gisue Hariri. The covers also highlight "ordinary" women, like Uber driver Debra Solomon, or softball player Jade Meehan.[49]

It is nothing less than a manifesto of inclusive beauty, which also sounds like a message of hope and a fight against discrimination. The issue is part of *Vogue*'s global "Hope" project: a collaboration between the twenty-six editions of *Vogue* for the September issue, united for the first time around a single editorial topic, at a crucial time like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Italian editorial team chose to interpret this theme in a highly ethical key, enhancing the concept of diversity and celebrating it in an unprecedented way for a traditional fashion magazine. With no hierarchies, no filters, no photographic or cosmetic effects, the 100 cover stars are shot frontally, in profile or three-quarter view, immortalized against a completely white background by Mark Borthwick, who reduced his authorial intervention to a minimum. Although no rigid police portrait scheme has been adopted, the photo series includes minimal variations in poses and framing (generally "close-up," "medium shot," "American shot." randomly alternating with twenty-eight full-length portraits). This impersonal style recalls the seriality and exasperated objectivity of some art projects, where the author intentionally exploits the automaticity of the photographic medium.[50] In other words, Borthwick has made use of the automaticity and relative mechanical objectivity, elevating them to his stylistic code, a language capable of directly revealing the diversity of the individual subjects from the homogenizing seriality of the various shots. As Claudio Marra points out, "photography degrees zero" implies an epiphanic revelation of what is placed in front of the camera.[51] Ultimately, the "transparency" of the photographic medium, deriving from its nature as an indexical sign,[52] was intentionally exploited to objectively capture, highlight, and celebrate the diversity of female beauty. In this perspective, the objectivity also helped deconstruct the beauty canons imposed by the male gaze that operated within Western visual culture, modeling the body ideals of entire generations.

Indeed, this politically committed stance is anticipated in previous months by an equally radical photographic project, born from the partnership between Gucci Beauty and the Photo *Vogue* Festival. We refer to a project that was immediately relaunched worldwide, obtaining a vast resonance in terms of audience. From June 16, 2020, the day of its publication on *Vogue.it*, it immediately went viral on social media and was then relaunched by various international press agencies, such as CNN and The Independent, BBC, and Al Jazeera. Enthusiastically welcomed for its innovative power, *Vogue Arabia* described it as a "powerful story of freedom."[53] At the same time *[dadan] izm*—a secular Turkish lifestyle magazine that fights back against obscurantism—celebrated it as a courageous choice capable of inspiring change in worlds such as the fashion and beauty industry, which are probably still far from breaking down stereotypes or taboos.[54] The photographic series mentioned above is, in fact, the result of

an Instagram-based scouting project launched at the end of 2019, inviting people to post photos on the social networking platform on the theme of "Unconventional Beauty," using the hashtag #theguccibeautyglitch.

So, in February 2020, two young photographers were selected, Catherine Servel and David PD Hyde, who were commissioned to create an editorial capable of representing Gucci Beauty's vision. Although both investigated the concept of diversity by overturning traditional aesthetic standards, Hyde's editorial was more successful and attracted more media attention. The young British photographer aimed to "push the boundary of beauty by having different types of beautiful faces and bring them together as one unity."[55] Firmly believing that fashion and photography can positively impact society, promoting change, he then selected a series of unconventional models, including Ellie Goldstein, an eighteen-year-old British girl with Down's syndrome. Thus, the viral images in which she appeared as an ambassador for Gucci Mascara became a kind of non-normative beauty manifesto, generating praise for highlighting inclusion and diversity discourse. They challenged the now leading aesthetic standards and underlined the need to increase the representation of minorities, people with disabilities and visible differences that have so far been excluded from mainstream fashion media.

In Hyde's editorial, Goldstein is presented without filters, without cosmetic artifices, with total candor and authenticity behind and in front of the camera. Once again, both Goldstein and the other models in the campaign were immortalized against a white background, allowing their faces and bodies to emerge, but unlike the "September Issue" cover stars, they were not caged in a rigid scheme of "artificial" poses. On the contrary, in several images by Hyde, the models were free to assume natural poses: they smile, embrace each other as if in a friendly game between teenagers, which helps give the photo series an additional sense of authenticity. In short, by intentionally exploiting its transparent view of the world, the photography is once again called upon to witness the presence of unconventional bodies that, much more than products to be advertised, need visibility in the media: visibility represents the first step toward overcoming stigmas and prejudices. The medium has thus mirrored without filters what was happening in front of the camera, breaking down the taboo on disability, and so contributing to reposition our gaze on bodies usually excluded from the galaxy

of fashion, revealing and unveiling them in an epiphanic sense, to the point of estranging and thus giving them greater importance, poignancy, and urgency.[56]

It is nothing more than praise for authenticity and total transparency, which finds punctual recognition in the various initiatives of the Photo *Vogue* Festival mentioned above. An incubator and tool for developing discussions on inclusion and diversity through exhibitions, talks, screenings, and portfolio reviews is the first photography festival to explore the shared grounds between ethics and aesthetics. Born in 2016, conceived by Alessia Glaviano and co-curated by Chiara Bardelli Nonino, the festival is connected to the Photo *Vogue* section of the website, the photographic platform by *Vogue.it* curated by Photo Editors of *Vogue Italia* that gives visibility to the works of young emerging photographers and is open to all photographic genres, from portraiture to reportage, from fashion to street photography.[57] These works are often selected and exhibited during the exhibitions organized within the festival, thus contributing to give space and resonance to the point of view of the new generations. Thus, it is that the Italian magazine, through the Photo *Vogue* Festival, has begun to take a clear, politically and socially committed position through group exhibitions such as *The Female Gaze* (2016 edition), *Embracing Diversity* (2018 edition), and *A Glitch in the System. Deconstructing Stereotypes* (2019 edition). Exhibitions that have certainly contributed to support and accelerate the "inclusive turn" of the magazine in recent years, although the real "material engine" of this change is to be found in the intensification on social media of discourses of opposition to cultural projections and traditional gender roles imposed by mainstream media and dominant culture. Speaking on the occasion of the first edition of the Photo *Vogue* Festival, Glaviano highlighted the role of such practices as an agent of change in the fashion photography business. According to her, social networking platforms have made "women's voices explode, giving them an additional channel to express themselves, where they can playfully post photos, alone, with friends, in a kind of game, of exploration."[58] Therefore, they have accelerated the process of emancipation and democratization of the female gaze, giving women back the right to self-representation with complete freedom, beyond the stereotypes imposed by the "referees of taste" or the male gaze.

Conclusions

If a picture cannot determine the change of the *status quo*, it can undoubtedly become its catalyst, in both a negative and positive sense. The constant dissemination in the traditional media, primarily in the fashion magazines, of images capable of fueling unachievable body standards, often portrayed from an objectifying and sexualizing male perspective, has contributed to feed and consolidate highly discriminating canons of beauty. The possibility offered by social media and camera phones to independently manage the representation of the body and its "exposure" on the social stage is instead encouraging an inclusive opening to diversity.

Photographic imagery shared on social media is potentially pervasive and viral. Through a simple hashtag, it can reach a broad audience and potentially go around the world. From this perspective, an unconventional body has a better chance of being represented and seen than in the past. Its picture will not have to be judged by so-called arbiters of taste before being exposed to a wider gaze. Ultimately, social media grants visibility even for people who were generally excluded from the visual narratives of mass media. It follows that their now complete revelation of "diversity" leads to the fall of the visual taboo and gives rise to their legitimization in mainstream narratives. In other words, social media, through shared images, facilitate the transgression of the arena of interdict, of the forbidden to see, in which diversity had been relegated, to the point of legitimizing its existence. After all, as Giorgio Agamben wrote, "Profanation implies a neutralization of what it profanes. Once profaned, what was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use."[59]

This phenomenon has helped to stimulate a change in this direction also in fashion communication and publishing. *Vogue Italia*, in fact, represents a significant example of how traditional magazines can change their narrative repertoires, starting from the deconstruction of the restrictive standards of beauty that they had helped to solidify and convey. Operations such as "The 100 Covers Issue" or #theguccibeautyglitch, mediating between aesthetic needs and ethical urgencies, can generate awareness of current issues and promote social change. On the other hand, fashion photography is continually called upon to solidify a change, a stylistic change, and can therefore be said to have a structural disposition to fix innovation through an image. It follows that in this "regime of perpetual

change in taste," it can be elevated to the status of agent of transformation capable of acting also on a cultural and social level.

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NOTES

1. On the notion of "field of the photographable," see Pierre Bourdieu, ed., *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

2. Patrizia Calefato, *La moda oltre la moda* (Milano: Lupetti, 2011), 9.

3. See https://girlgaze.com/.

4. See "Who We Are," at https://www.zebedeemanagement.co.uk/.

5. Francesca Marani, "Infinite possibilità," *Vogue Italia,* November 2018, 72.

6. Nancy Johnson-Hunt, "Dreams for Sale: Ideal Beauty in the Eyes of the Advertiser," *M/C Journal* 23, no. 1 (2020), https://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1646.

7. See Claudio Marra, *Nelle ombre di un sogno. Storia e idee della fotografia di moda* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2004), 3–42. See also Federica Muzzarelli, *L'immagine del desiderio. Fotografia di moda tra arte e comunicazione* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2006), 116–57.

8. Francesca Alinovi, "La fotografia: L'illusione della realtà," in *La fotografia. Illusione o rivelazione?*, ed. F. Alinovi and C. Marra (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1981), 8.

9. Alinovi, *La fotografia*, 75.

10. Alinovi, *La fotografia*, 18.

11. On photographic images credibility status, or their certification of truthfulness, see Alinovi, *La fotografia,* 15–18. The status of documentary evidence commonly attributed to photographic images derives from their indexical nature, of trace sign conceptually analogous to Marcel Duchamp's ready-made in taking "pieces of the world" and presenting them "as they are" on the image plane. For a further in-depth

view of the photography as an indexical sign and its conceptually connection to ready-made, see Rosalind Krauss, *Teoria e storia della fotografia* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2000). See also Claudio Marra, *L'immagine infedele. La falsa rivoluzione della fotografia digitale* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2006); Roberto Signorini, *Arte del fotografico. I confini del fotografico e la riflessione teorica degli ultimi vent'anni* (Pistoia: CRT, 2001).

12. Federica Muzzarelli, *L'immagine del desiderio. Fotografia di moda tra arte e comunicazione* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2009), 117–57.

13. "Under the shadows of a dream" (Nelle ombre di un sogno) is the translation of the title of a book by Claudio Marra, focused on fashion photography. This emblematic title, which is a quote from the song "Una giornata al mare" by Paolo Conte, underlines the relationship between fashion photography and the dream sphere. See Claudio Marra, *Nelle ombre di un sogno. Storia e idee della fotografia di moda* (Milano Bruno Mondadori, 2004).

14. See Johnson-Hunt, "Dreams for Sale." See also Danielle Sarver Coombs and Bob Batchelor, *We Are What We Sell: How Advertising Shapes American Life . . . and Always Has* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014).

15. Lucia Ruggerone, "Il corpo simulato: immagini femminili nella fotografia di moda," *Studi di sociologia* 24, no. 3 (July–September 2004): 301.

16. Ruggerone, "Il corpo simulato," 287.

17. See Mario Perniola, "Idiotie und Glanz. Über Ekel und Pracht in der zeitgenössischen Kust," *Lettre International* 45 (1999): 59–61. See also Annelie Lütgens, "Neither Clearly Fashion, Nor Clearly Art," in *Chic Clicks . . . Creativity and Commerce in Contemporary Fashion Photography*, ed. U. Lehmann et al. (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2002), T22–27.

18. Armando Fumagalli, "Il corpo nella comunicazione di moda," *MEDIC. Metodologia e didattica clinica* 18, nos. 1–3 (December 2010): 35–42.

19. See, among the others: Mia Foley Sypeck, James J. Gray, and Anthony H. Ahrens, "No Longer Just a Pretty Face: Fashion Magazines' Depictions of Ideal Female Beauty from 1959 to 1999," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 36, no. 3 (November 2004): 342–47; J. Kevin Thompson and Eric Stice, "Thin-Ideal Internalization: Mounting Evidence for a New Risk Factor for Body-Image Disturbance and Eating Pathology," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 10, no. 5 (October 2001): 181–93. Se also A. Poorani, "Who Determines the Ideal Body? A Summary of Research Findings on Body Image," *New Media and Mass Communication* 2 (2012): 1–12.

20. Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

21. Roland Barthes, *Il senso della moda. Forme e significati dell'abbigliamento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 136–47.

22. Barthes, *Il senso della moda*, 145–46.

23. See Saveria Capecchi, "Il corpo perfetto. Genere, media e processi identitari," in *Media, corpi, sessualità. Dai corpi esibiti al cybersex*, ed. Saveria Capecchi and Elisabetta Ruspini (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2009), 37–62.

24. On the construction of the fashion model body type, see, among the others: A. Mears, *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Patrícia Soley-Beltran, "Fashion Models as Ideal Embodiments of Normative Identity," *Trípodos*, no. 18 (2006): 23–43; Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Paolo Volonté, "The Thin Ideal and the Practice of Fashion," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 19, no. 2 (July 2017): 252–70.

25. Ruggerone, "Il corpo simulato," 279.

26. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

27. Ruggerone, "Il corpo simulato," 284. See also Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge, 1984).

28. See Saveria Capecchia, "Il corpo erotizzato delle donne negli spot pubblicitari e nelle riviste di moda femminile," *Polis*, no. 3 (2011): 393–418. See also Lorella Zanardo, *Il corpo delle donne* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010).

29. Nancy Roberts, "Diversity and Inclusion in Publishing: What Do We Know?," *Pub Res Q* (2021).

30. Bourdieu, *Photography*, 34.

31. See Elena Pavan, "The Ties that Fight: Il potere integrativo delle reti online femministe," *Società Mutamento Politica* 11 (2020): 79–89.

32. Pavan, "The Ties that Fight," 79.

33. Alan Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1980).

34. For an overview of the concept of "intersectionality" in feminist theory, see Sirma Bilge, "Recent Feminist Outlooks on Intersectionality," *Diogenes* 57, no. 1 (October 2010): 58–72; Anna Carastathis, "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 5 (May 2014): 304–14.

35. See Zizi Papacharissi, *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* (New York: Routledge, 2011). See also Manash P. Goswami, "Social Media and Hashtag Activism," in *Liberty, Dignity and Change in Journalism*, ed. Susmita Bala (New Delhi: Kanishka Publication, 2018), 252–62.

36. See Sherry L. Turner, Heather Hamilton, Meija Jacobs, Laurie M. Angood, and Deanne Hovde Dwyer, "The Influence of Fashion Magazines on the Body Image Satisfaction of College Women: An Exploratory Analysis," *Adolescence* 32, no. 127 (1997): 603–14; Kim Jung-Hwan and Sharron J. Lennon, "Mass Media and Self-Esteem, Body Image, and Eating Disorder Tendencies," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 25, no. 1 (January 2007): 3–23.

37. On the phenomenon of "cosmetic surgery" filters on Instagram as opposed to the #nofilter movement, see Sofia Viganò, "The Aesthetics of Honesty," *Vogue Italia*, March 2020, 116–17.

38. The convergence and incorporation of the camera into a mobile device have determined a radical change in photographic practice. The medium has become a personal tool always at hand and ready to use, to the point of democratizing the photographic act and moving it from an essentially festive to an everyday act. See Chiara Pompa, *Trasparenze Radicali. Fotografia e pratiche estetiche alle soglie del nuovo millennio* (Milano: Mondadori, 2021).

39. See, among the others: Raffaella Perna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo in Italia negli anni Settanta* (Milano: Postmedia, 2013); Cristina Casero, *Gesti di rivolta. Arte, fotografia e femminismo a Milano 1975–1980* (Enciclopedia delle donne, 2020); Elena Reckitt, *Arte e Femminismo* (London: Phaidon 2005).

40. Ruxandra Looft, "#girlgaze: photography, fourth-wave feminism, and social media advocacy," *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 31, no. 6 (August 2018): 892–902.

41. Gilles Lipovetsky, "More than Fashion," in *Chic Clicks. Creativity and Commerce in Contemporary Fashion Photography*, ed. Ulrich Lehmann et al. (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2002), T8–10.

42. Carlo Ducci, "Our Social Committent and View on Phenomena," *Vogue Italia*, April 2014, 245.

43. Ducci, "Our Social Committent," 245.

44. Chiara Bardelli Nonino, "Questo Non è (Solo) Un Giornale Di Moda," *Vogue Italia*, April 2020, 59–61.

45. Nonino, "Questo Non è (Solo) Un Giornale Di Moda," 60.

46. In 1942 Lee Miller gained recognition as the American war correspondent from the European front for *Vogue Studio*. From 1942 until the end of the war, Miller documented, among other things, the use of napalm for the first time, the liberation of Paris, the liberation of the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Dachau. In June 1945, *Vogue USA* and *British Vogue* published in their Victory Numbers some shots of the Dachau concentration camp. For a further in-depth view of Lee Miller as a war photo reporter, see L. Hilditch, "BELIEVE IT! Lee Miller's Second World War Photographs as Modern Memorials," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 209–22. See also Federica Muzzarelli, *Lee Miller / Man Ray. Arte, moda, fotografia* (Bologna: Atlante, 2016).

47. The cover story of the September 2007 issue entitled "Make Love, Not War" offers a sugar-coated view of war, veiled by a "glamorous patina" that transports war into the space of real-life escapism peculiar to fashion magazines.

48. Emanuele Farneti, "Editor's letter," *Vogue Italia*, September 2020, 38.

49. On September 2020 issue of *Vogue Italia* and its 100 covers, see https://www.vogue.it/en/article/vogue-italia-september-issue-100-covers.

50. Federica Muzzarelli, *Formato tessera. Storie, arte e idee in photomatic* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003).

51. On the Roland Barthes's notion of "writing degree zero" applied to the "photographic writing" of reality, see Claudio Marra, *Fotografia e pittura nel Novecento (e oltre)* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2012), 97–100.

52. The conceptual transparency of photographic images derives from the ability of the medium to return the real to our gaze without the veils of a figurative and represented dimension. And it is by virtue of its DNA, of its condition—as formulated by Roland Barthes—as a "perfect analogon of reality" or—speaking in semiotics—of its nature of the indexical sign, "trace sign," that the photography can become the "mirror of the world," an exact and objective copy of it. See Roland Barthes, "Les message photographique," *Communicatios*, no. 1 (1961): 127–38; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). See also Claudio Marra, *L'immagine infedele. La falsa rivoluzione della fotografia digitale* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2006).

53. Francesco Chiamulera, "Un'idea luminosa," *Vogue Italia*, November 2020, 186–87.

54. Nazlı Senem Dalgıç, "Gucci Beauty'nin yeni kampanya yüzü Ellie Goldstein ile tanışın," *[dadan] izm* (August 20, 2020), https://www.dadanizm.com/gucci-beautynin-yeni-kampanya-yuzu-ellie-goldstein.

55. Francesca Marani, "The Gucci Beauty Glitch. David PD Hyde," *Vogue.it*, June 16, 2020, https://www.vogue.it/fotografia/article/gucci-beauty-glitch-david-pd-hyde.

56. On the concept of "ostranenie," or "estrangement," see Viktor B. Šklovskij, *Teoria della prosa* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976). See also Carlo Ginzburg, *Occhiacci di legno. Dieci riflessioni sulla distanza* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1998); Umberto Eco, *Le poetiche di Joyce. Dalla "Summa" al "Finnepans Wake"* (Milano: Bompiani, 1966). On the notion of "photographic estrangement," see Claudio Marra, *Fotografia e pittura nel Novecento (e oltre)* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2012), 168–69.

57. An overview of the PhotoVogue project and its manifesto is available on the following link: https://www.vogue.it/en/photovogue/manifesto.

58. Lella Scalia, "The Female Gaze 2016," *Vogue Italia*, November 2016, 173.

59. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanazioni* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2005), 88.