NEW FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

PRESTEL

PACO PEREGRÍN

'Nonsense in the Dark', 2009
photography by Paco Peregrín
courtesy Paco Peregrín
styling by Kattaca

Spanish photographer Paco Peregrín combines avant-garde futurism with otherworldly beauty. Using a technique that distinguishes itself by its clean lines and rich contrasts, Peregrín's images of contemporary fashion recreate the familiar as Arcadian elegance. At the same time there is a persistent sense that something sinister is lurking beneath the surface, an effect achieved through disconcerting interventions on the face and body.

The alien aspect of Peregrín's work is achieved through a theatrical use of makeup and a dedication to digital post-production, techniques rooted in his multidisciplinary background in theatre and design. His vivid exploration of colour dictates the tone of each series he creates, the consistency throughout his work found not so much in the colours themselves as the attitude he takes towards them. Whether relishing in the cool austerity of a restricted palette for his 2009 editorial 'Nonsense in the Dark', or indulging in all-out kaleidoscopic arrangements for his 2011 solo exhibition *Beautiful Monster*, this vibrant fusion is exercised at both extremes but delivered with a consistent finish.

The fashion depicted in 'Nonsense in the Dark' is firmly focused in fantasy (pages 195–97) . An air of disquiet is created through a futuristic take on tribal dress that is elevated by cosmetic enhancement, deployed either to wash out features or to pick out details in black. The clothes disfigure the body and exaggerate the hair, the figures themselves set within cool, concrete settings that border on the abstract. There is something pensive and uncertain about this series; we are being invited to look upon a future world that seems to have developed out of science fiction, but it is unclear whether it is a utopia or dystopia.

Peregrín's portraits for *Beautiful Monster* epitomise the double-edged nature of his art. The photographs glimmer with the beauty of the people they depict, but the faces themselves have been subjected to such intrusive over-adornment that the line between seduction and horror has become blurred. Each image involves refiguring of the face, perhaps the most immediately vulnerable part of the body. One woman leans forward suggestively, but her eyes are hidden by a circle of diamonds. The diamonds spread out across her features and push out from between her lips, creating a mask that draws out the structure of her skull. In another portrait, a head is bound in muslin and makeup leaks unsettlingly out from beneath (pages 198–99). Another is entirely obscured as her own hair takes over. Despite this monstrous undertone, however, it is a curious beauty that dominates. In finding this beauty in uncertain places, Peregrín's work creates a platform from which to raise questions about the presentation of the human form as a canvas for fashion.

INTRODUCTION / **TIM BLANKS**

The relationship between photography and fashion dates from the earliest years of the medium. Louis Daguerre announced the first complete practical photographic process in 1839. The calotype of Lady Mary Ruthven made five years later by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson is generally considered to be ground zero for the fashion photograph. But the relationship was never one of equals. If the camera went on to capture epochal moments in the course of human history, its application in fashion was accorded rather less respect.

'The history of fashion photography is, quite simply, a record of those photographs made to show or sell clothing or accessories.'[1] That is the first line of Nancy Hall-Duncan's introduction to her 1979 overview, also called *The History of Fashion Photography*. The definite article is telling. It suggests that Duncan was confident she was producing a *definitive* something on the genre. And maybe, at that particular point in time, her confidence wasn't so misplaced. There weren't many other chroniclers stepping up to the fashion plate. Fashion photography had barely attained legitimacy as anything other than the fashion industry's shop window. Read the august critics of the time – the *New York Times*' Hilton Kramer, say, in his review of a 1975 exhibition of six decades of fashion snapping – and you can't miss the slightly sniffy sense that he thought it a dubious proposition at best, and an entirely unsavoury one, bordering on pornography, at worst. On that last point, by the way, Kramer's particular beef was with Helmut Newton, whose position in fashion photography's Olympian pantheon is now unassailable.

The reductive nature of Duncan's statement could also be excused by the fact that she was, after all, looking back over a century or so. Excuse? No, *j'accuse*, with one single piece of evidence for fashion photography's defence: a ten-page spread from the September 1962 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* featuring proto-supermodel Suzy Parker and director Mike Nichols photographed by Richard Avedon as they re-enacted paparazzi-hounded vignettes from Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's very public *amour fou*. Savagely funny, wildly topical and ridiculously glamorous, this was fashion photography as the fiercest comment on its social and cultural context, and I'll always come back to it as a moment of white-light vindication.

Around the same time that Kramer was feeling queasy over Newton (and waxing *way* less than enthusiastic over Richard Avedon), Susan Sontag was rhapsodising that the greatest fashion photography is more than the photography of fashion. This was always true, but it's a point that has been made with particular intensity since Sontag gave it voice more than thirty years ago. And it's being made again in this book which, in its curation of fashion-based work from the past few years, most of it from an innovative new generation of photographers, underscores the peculiar maturity-in-diversity of the medium. No longer in search of – let alone in need of – legitimacy, fashion photography has become a reference for and an influence on the culture at large. So insidious is it, in fact, that the image has become all: the dream, the desire, even a surrogate for the clothes themselves. Can't afford a new outfit? Buy a magazine. The medium has become the message. This has been most succinctly expressed as a shift from imitation (the image instructing you in how to duplicate its content) to identification (the image offering a more abstract pointer in how to actually *be*).

It's tempting to analyse that shift in the broad strokes of the same inevitable cultural dialectic which transforms every other creative endeavour: hypothesis/antithesis/synthesis. Take as the original hypothesis the formalism, elegance and elitism that characterised fashion photography's practice throughout much of the twentieth century. The influential French semiotician and dialectical wizard Roland Barthes scornfully observed that fashion itself was forbidden to offer 'anything aesthetically or morally unpleasant',[2] although what Barthes saw as abject failure was equally an accurate reflection of the world on which photographers trained their

1 Nancy Hall-Duncan
The History of Fashion Photography
Alpine Book Company, 1979, p. 9

2 Roland Barthes
Système de la mode
Paris, 1967

lenses. As that world changed, so did the photography. The salon surrendered to the street. The rise of ready-to-wear introduced the democracy of choice as opposed to the dictatorship of demagogic couture. It inspired the emergence of an egalitarian antithesis, with an attendant emphasis on surreal, provocative or confrontational elements which Barthes, who died in 1980, would surely have found more pleasing. In the representation of fashion, the clothes became less important than the attitude of the people wearing them. Capturing that attitude took fashion photography into the 'real' world, culminating in the everyday intimacy of the snapshot aesthetic.

If the consummation of any dialectic is the synthesis of hypothesis and antithesis, that ought to add up to a tidy union of elitism and egalitarianism in contemporary photography's approach to fashion. One key instrument of synthesis does in fact make that union quite graphic. It is the old-school house organ of the fashion industry, the glossy monthly magazine, although its most effective contemporary manifestation is more likely to be biannual. There has been a global proliferation of such publications. First up were *i-D* and *The Face*, kick-started in the DIY ferment of the post-punk years. Their early commitment to edgy, idiosyncratic/artistic self-expression was mutated over the years by the expensive production values we're now familiar with, particularly in those biannuals. They are usually underwritten by substantial advertising content, which turns them into perfect paradigms of art and commerce. In that, they are like outriders of the contemporary art world: small, mobile galleries with endlessly revolving exhibitions curated by editors, art directors and stylists, meaning that there have never been so many opportunities for young and/or new talents to display their work. The authority that editorial vision gives the best of these magazines ensures that their content becomes part of the broad cultural continuum that weaves through art, music, movies and design. Fashion comes all the way round to influence its influences.

That is one element of the 'newness' in fashion photography that this book seeks to communicate. Another is the role of technology. The digital revolution has made the medium faster and younger, which is evident in these pages. Digital innovation has stretched the limits of photography, fostering a technical facility that allows a head-spinning mix of media. The amount of sensory information that can be compressed into one single image has been stretched. Guy Bourdin's assistants once had to dye the sea bluer, paint the grass greener. Now, anything the artist's mind conceives is within reach of his or her fingertips. Look at the way an image can be transmogrified with digital brushstrokes. The photographic and the painterly co-join. Flesh itself becomes entirely mutable.

Still, what I find most intriguing is the way that the essence of *New Fashion Photography* suggests what the future might ultimately construe as the medium's eternal verities. Surprisingly, they look, on the whole, like a return to that original elegant, formal hypothesis. Icon-making in the classic tradition – going back to look forward, as it were. There is a chill composure in the images here. The extravagant mess of life is as distant as it was in the pictures of Adolph de Meyer, Cecil Beaton, Irving Penn, even Avedon. Actually, *why* should this be so surprising? It's the same urge that has impelled Steven Meisel through what may be the most durably dazzling career in fashion photography. Meisel would probably deny that his work is about anything more than the photography of fashion, but that shouldn't stop us taking a cue from Sontag and wondering what broader state of mind such image-making might reflect.

The work curated here may be diverse in appearance, but the connective thread is an open engagement with artifice. Innovation practically encourages it. After all, if technology makes anything possible for you, what better way to test it than with a carefully constructed irreality? But here, even the digital counter-revolutionaries – the anti-Photoshoppers and post-post-prodders – are

channeling visions of artificiality. Would it be safe to assume that reality bites?

Artifice as an escape – or a refuge – has traditionally been symptomatic of a culture's decadence. The overt historicism of some of these images at least indicates an awareness of such a thing. But more striking is the reliance on hidden or masked features, from delicate veiling to complete obliteration. Identity – cultural, religious, gender – is one of the great social issues of the age. Fashion is an industry which trades in image as an expression of identity. The mask is an obvious comment on role-playing. Your choice of mask can reveal as much as it conceals. That much is evident here. Digital technology also allows a literal fluidity to reflect shifts in identity. But it seems to me there is another dynamic in the work in this collection. The notion of identification gains more traction. It reinforces a feeling that times are so uncertain it might be preferable to withdraw, maybe even to hide away, in the familiarity of the past or the unimaginability of the future. This hermetic sensibility is reflected in the hermetic nature of the images themselves and their worlds within worlds. After years of being invited to participate in the lives of Juergen Teller, Terry Richardson et al., not to mention the increasingly deadening weight of street style coverage, we are once again outside looking in.

It's not a bad place to be. There is, after all, something a little audacious at work here. Photography's Holy Grail has always been the decisive moment, legendary lensman Henri Cartier-Bresson's code for the illuminating flash of photographic truth. Maybe one of fashion photography's 'news' flashes is that the *indecisive* moment is closer to the truth, a tentative, transient instance which underscores the illusory nature of reality. The pursuit of beauty is a crash course in transience. It may be timeless in the abstract, but it is over in seeming seconds in the here and now. The melancholic tension between timelessness and transience made ideal fodder for centuries of painters, playwrights and poets. Now, it's manna from heaven for fashion photographers too.

The timeless-versus-transient debate is just one of the conversations that keeps this present volume humming along. There are others: realism versus surrealism; Freud versus Jung; innocence versus desecration; beauty versus horror. In fact, the lingering impression as you come to the end of the collection is that you could have been at the side-event of a symposium on the movies of Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch and Roman Polanski. Alexander Liberman, who helped define the concept of the art director in his two decades at *Vogue*, once said the role of fashion was to seduce. Over the past twenty years that role has widened, as fashion has become an adjunct of the entertainment industry. Now it enthralls, and appalls as well. It tells stories too, fantastic fairy stories. The fantasy of fashion was often a stick with which its detractors beat it. Here, the fantasy is unabashedly all-powerful.

New Fashion Photography is a sequence of interrupted narratives, whose characters are captured in mid-flux. Like Lynch's *Blue Velvet* or Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, they have a passing acquaintance with real life, but their substance is dream-like disorientation. Just like those directors, the photographers are auteurs who orchestrate their visions with a team of dedicated collaborators. I'm thinking about how those two movies transcended time, place and medium to become cultural totems – dark, shiny fetish objects, in fact, which is perfect because their subject matter was so embedded in fetish. But so is fashion. And that acknowledgement is right at the heart of *New Fashion Photography*.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION / **PAUL SLOMAN**

The soft contours of a portrait segue into a schism in 'Diesel White Out' by Tim Richardson for Commons & Sense Man *(pages 6–7). A digital fracturing creates a disruption of the image and a destabilisation of the real. The relationship between reality and artifice has always been at the crux of fashion, but this is something new. In the post-millenial flux of new technologies, the illusions that lie beneath the surface of the image are worn on the outside. Fashion photography has become self-conscious; instead of containing itself within specific rules of engagement, its apparent contradictions have begun to explode out in a kaleidoscopic, cross-format haze.*

Multi-disciplinary photographer René Habermacher says 'Fashion photography is an expression of momentum'.[1] In the twenty-first century, this hinges on the perpetual motion of new electronic and social structures. For some time, fashion photography has appeared to sidestep a clear aspirational ideal as a solution to modern identity, but now it goes further. Nick Knight refuses to let his camera tie his subjects down to a fixed image, choosing instead to immerse them in amorphous fluids and powders, the substances of an unstable moment. Pierre Debusschere unstitches the fabric of reality in his photographs using the very technology that produces them. His images frequently break down into stuttering animated GIFs that exist in an uncertain hinterland between film and photography. Richardson's disruptions of the image build a world from the visual scratches and glitches in digital material, illuminating the hidden moments within the immediately visible. Taking a blade to his portraits for *Harper's Bazaar* China in 2010, Daniel Sannwald cuts into the surface of his images to reveal conflicting scenes beneath.

The explicit destabilisation of the image has done the same thing to time and place. As the instability of the digitised moment ignites a return to formal classicism, fundamental disturbances in the image upset the balance of explicitly traditional compositions. Eugenio Recuenco pits contemporary decadence against timeless domesticity in his reworked visions of classical paintings; Daniel Jackson throws Victorian society parties with Nietzschean undertones; Daniele + Iango apply twenty-first century gender subversions to the traditions and rituals of Japanese sumo and the Edo-period pleasure district.

Historical returns, here, evoke continuity in a present that seems immersed in the chaos of its own multiplicity. Parallels of capitalism and excess exist at one end; restraint and austerity at the other. Fashion photography has often begged, borrowed and stolen from history. In *Fashion at The Edge*, theorist Caroline Evans describes fashion's 'particularly promiscuous historical behaviour, its brief life span and its incessant trawling through the old to fabricate the new.'[2] Photography, however, increasingly borrows from its own past as well as the history of the arts to make sense of the present. It is not so much a revisitation of history as the history of image-making itself. Formal association in Sannwald's series 'Looking for a Certain Ratio' for *Vogue Homme +* in 2011, in which a warped tripod matches the contours of its subject, echoes Manuel Vilariño's 1985 photograph *Sula Bassana*, which pairs a hammer with the neck and beak of a bird. Sean and Seng's comical pairing of Liya Kebede with a flamingo uses the same idea but, abandoning any clear reference point between the two, it playfully rejects the formal relationship. This animal absurdity also reaches further back into the history of fashion photography, and indeed fashion itself, recalling the Surrealist fantasies of Grete Stern and the conceptual fashion symbolism of Elsa Schiaparelli in the 1930s.

The call of the Surreal, a 'cry of the mind turning back on itself',[3] echoes loudly. A Lynchian version of it is channeled in the images of Miles Aldridge; magic realist tangents come through in those of Ruven Afanador, Yelena Yemchuk, and Sanchez and Mongiello, who draw on the experimental writing of authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges and Mikhail Bulgakov. The multiple layers of these photographs embrace fluidity of meaning and the power of association, but the associations are complex and convoluted. Images are piled high with layer upon layer of symbols and signifiers. In a sea of psycho-symbolism and cross-cultural refer-

ences, there are illusions and delusions, twists and turns, as images lurch backwards into the past and reach forward into imagined futures. This looks like the spectacle of fashion in its highest gear – so high that it might seem to be hyperventilating. Evans relates the overwhelming performance of fashion to Theodor Adorno's concept of the phantasmagoria, in which 'the tricks, deceits and illusions of nineteenth-century commodity culture, with its sleights of hand, peddled false desires.'[4] The mechanics of capitalism, Adorno argues, are hiding behind the greatest of spectacles – a majestic delusion. This is a wall of misdirection ultimately designed to bury the working methods of capitalist production behind a false surface of marketing and retail. And on this subject, fashion photography does carry a weight on its shoulders. 'In fashion, the phantasmagoria of commodities presses closest to the skin,' Susan Buck-Morss reiterates in *The Dialiectics of Seeing*.[5] Fashion appears inextricably linked to something from which it attempts to hide through the outward diversion of its own performance.

The essential yet turbulent relationship between fashion and commerce shares an alignment with art. Evoking the factory treadmill of Andy Warhol half a century before, Damien Hirst's provocative diamond-encrusted skull, labelled *For the Love of God*, brazenly exploits a driving force that most artists might prefer to ignore. Hirst's commercial and creative relationship with fashion – he has designed shoes with Manolo Blahnik using his marketable spot designs, and has produced conceptual photography in collaboration with Rankin – reinforces this parallel. It is nothing new; even the great portrait painters of the eighteenth century responded to market forces, dressing their subject in the latest fashions, symbols of wealth and social standing. And in the same way, in the pages of magazines, the fashion photographer is tied to a fashion product. Certainly the escapist fantasy inherent in many of these photographs offers an aspirational thrill that goes back to the birth of fashion. But there is a slight difference in the selective incisions into history that are being made today. These photographs are, more often than not, explicitly self-referential; the deceit of their illusions and sleights of hand is undone by the overt nature of their own artifice. The relationship between fashion and commerce may remain uncomfortable, but in this new, more self-aware photography, if there is a deceptive merging of the real and the imagined, then the viewer is complicit. The relationship between the constructed nature of fashion and the everyday reality to which it speaks is no longer disguised.

In many ways, this is a continuation. The discordant complexities of these photographs are an extension of, and answer to, an aesthetic rupture of another kind that occured at the end of the previous millennium. As the close of the twentieth century approached, fashion and photography were giving way to pre-millenial anxiety. In the wake of postmodernism, structures of narrative, time and hierarchy had been pulled apart, fed back into each other and spewed out half-masticated in a soupy blend of contradictory paradigms. It was the manifestation of an ever diminishing faith in established pillars of authority, in the face of rapid globalisation and technological proliferation. And if the present seemed hard to get to grips with, the rules of the future looked even more volatile and unpredictable. Fashion itself responded with a strange brew of paranoia, fantasy and self-deconstruction. It pillaged the past with a sense of abandon that undermined the periods from which it drew. Styles were taken out of context, rendered meaningless, then slammed together to create new, relativist statements about the postmodern condition. The threat of social, global and even media fragmentation was visualised as decay; the deathly echoes of the spectacle were being played out on the catwalks of designers such as Alexander McQueen, Viktor & Rolf, and Junya Watanabe.

Fashion had a statement to make, but it oscillated between dangerous glamour and a courageous new tendency towards self-analysis. In his Autumn/Winter 1999–2000 catwalk show for Givenchy, McQueen favoured mannequins over living models; they rose out of the floor and descended again, like spectres lifted from the grave. Fashion was looking at itself and what it saw was an

objectification that sucked the life out of its victims. A strain of photography embraced the swell of the dark. Photographers began to plough a morbid path into subjects previously the preserve of artists – sex, death and mortality. Photographer Sean Ellis pioneered a sultry gothicism which mastered the message that came from the fashion designers. Ellis's 'The Clinic' for *The Face* suspended models on hooks; 'A Taste of Arsenic' let children loose in a menacing vision of liberation that inverted the hierarchy of age. In the hands of photographers, this deathly fixation was closely intertwined with the fantasy that was being pursued by fashion itself. Heavy makeup, theatre and spectacle made for a mortal coil that was, contrarily, darkly seductive.

The deathly pallor of the end of the century represented the face of the catwalk as critic of fashion in an alienated moment, but another response looked for a solution. The raw, unprocessed shoots that emerged from the pages of Terry Jones and Nick Knight at *i-D*, Rankin and Jefferson Hack at *Dazed & Confused*, and under the editorship of Phil Bicker at *The Face* all represented a loosening of the parameters of control for fashion photography. It was the next step in a style known as the 'straight-up', pioneered by *i-D* founder Jones, who shot punk photographs against a white background and packaged them as *Not Another Punk Book*, and Knight, who did the same thing for skinheads shortly after. Realist experiments represented a yearning for authenticity in the face of the increasing chasm that came between the individual and fashion. At *Dazed* in the 1990s, sensing a disconnect between the everyday buyer of fashion and the darkening spectacle of high-end couture, Rankin and Hack set about returning the magazine's photography to those who actually wore the fashion it depicted. 'Blow-Up', a series of photographs of ordinary people photographed in booths set up in clubs, took the lessons of Jones' technique and those of *Interview* magazine in Europe to reunite fashion with the fashion scene itself. *Dazed* ran club nights in London and fed off the results in a two-way interaction, sweeping away the conventions of unattainable fashion imagery and reasserting the individual. Simultaneously, Knight was commissioining Juergen Teller for *i-D*, and Bicker was giving photographers and stylists complete freedom to express themselves in the pages of *The Face*. Stylists such as Corinne Day introduced secondhand clothes and personal items to modify editorials in a provocative exercise in customisation and casual realism that would capture a generation. As Charlotte Cotton explains in *Imperfect Beauty*, fashion image-makers were 'constructing narratives around characters that spoke of the aspirations and realities of contemporary youth culture'.[6] It was as if the photograph promised a window onto a very private interaction, shot at random, an archive from a private piece of film. The images felt grungy, real and gloriously untroubled. It was an emancipation of the photograph that established a new optimism for the art.

If the unrefined realism of these magazines has altered the foundations of contemporary photography, it is worth first noting, as Tim Blanks does, how little its raw visual aesthetic appears to have translated into the highly stylised fantasies of today. Authenticity appears to have visibly ebbed away from the frontline. Echoes of the dark, crepuscular glamour of the end of the millenium, on the other hand, carry on like ghosts of the previous century at the hands of photographers such as the LaRoache Brothers and Chadwick Tyler, although the message appears to have shifted. Reacting to the flat polish of a digital world, the clunky machinery of the LaRoache Brothers' 'Mechanical' has the nostalgic appeal of the Japanese steampunk aesthetic that draws on the era of British Victorian industry. This is a curious form of nostalgia written in petrol-black ink. Fashion and history materialise as more gloriously extravagant escapism in shoots such as Aram Bedrossian's 'Bonnie and Clyde' and Markus + Indrani's mythical 'Lady and the White Snake'. Cinematic framing suggests thrilling stories of lust and longing in the photographs of Wing Shya. They are a delicious indulgence; they seem at first to promise moments of complete escape from the real, rather than any expression of it. Their reference points are two steps removed from reality; the starting point for their narratives are already fictionalised stories themselves.

1 René Habermacher
interview with Filep Motwary
Un Nouveau Ideal, 2009

2 Caroline Evans
Fashion at the Edge
Yale University Press, 2003, p. 89

3 André Breton
Declaration of January 27, 1925
Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes
15 Rue de Grenelle

4 Evans, p. 89

5 Susan Buck-Morss
The Dialectics of Seeing:
Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project
1991, quoted in ibid., p. 92

6 Charlotte Cotton
Imperfect Beauty
V&A Publications, 2000, p. 6

In the twenty-first century, the intense focus on the fashion photograph as authentic document has become troubled by the very technology that is democratising photography. Documentary fashion photographs have become ubiquitous; home-grown style guides articulate the voice of the street from day to day. Meanwhile, the mass-media photograph, with the emergence of the Internet and digital software, has become increasingly unreliable; it can all too easily be manufactured. The false authenticity of the photographic image has emerged in propaganda wars between nations in games of global politics. It has threatened to become the illusion it tried to reject.

Ellis, in his 2006 shoot 'Paths of Glory', enjoys indulging in the ambiguities of the document and our diminishing faith in it. His images have the jerky realism of photography on the edge of a warzone; the shots are blurred moments taken from beneath shattered brickwork and shards of metal. Yet, amidst the chaos of the front line, the subject that strides through the detritus has the elegance and assurance of the fashion model. This 'authentic moment' is explicitly constructed. Chadwick Tyler creates false authenticity through the prism of history; his portraits recall the pioneering Depression-era photography of Dorothea Lange. A portrait of Lily Cole by the LaRoache Brothers marries gloomy fantasy with the false authenticity of the Victorian-era *carte-de-visite* family album. These photographs problematise the real in the fashion photograph again, just as it appeared to be growing comfortable with itself.

Kourtney Roy's explicitly artificial backdrops in her 'Ideal Woman' portraits are a reminder of the early artifice of photographs such as Vittorio Alinari's *Cyclists* of 1895, an image in which men posed on bikes are suspended by cables to create the illusion of movement. Roy's images question the surface and let the viewer in on the constructed nature of portraiture. This is self-conscious artifice, and the question that follows is where the real becomes situated, if it is present at all. If fashion photography, in its return to conjured spectacle, is not encouraging us to wrap ourselves up in a cloak of falsehood and misdirection, what positive message is coming out of such self-consciously inauthentic imagery?

An intimation of an answer can be found in the work of artist Jeff Wall, who recreates authentic moments as staged reconstructions, disrupting our sense of the photograph as reliable source. His image *Dead Troops Talk* enacts the impossible. The authority of the image as capturing a genuine moment is broken down, but in its place the potential for the image itself to speak is opened. The imagined idea brings the dead to life, and gives voice to something beneath the surface. Looking again at Roy's 'ideal women', they may be posed against false backdrops, but the power of the image comes from the conflict between this and the emotional reality of the women themselves. Miles Aldridge, in his 2006 image 'First Impression' for *Vogue* Japan, creates a similar disconnect between the outer surface and the glassy eyes of the society women he depicts, as does Wing Shya in his portrayal of the distant gazes of men and women as they attempt to contain lustful and escapist yearnings. This is the lesson of Cindy Sherman's charade, embraced by the industry it serves to critique. It draws attention to something on the inside. In doing so it responds both to the troubles of the twentieth-century catwalk and the optimistic emancipation of the 'straight-up' revolution.

With the cracked surface of fashion worn shamelessly on the outside, the potential for a more meaningful relationship with a subliminal narrative gains weight. The acceptance of the complex interaction between identity and economy pushes the pursuit of reality in photography into a space that focuses on an intimate, dream-like realm. Fashion returns as a signifier of interior identity and consciousness. Just as science fiction addresses the present through the abstract parallels of imagined worlds, so the emphasis on fantasy reflects on a reality situated in the present moment; a reality that echoes Breton's 'mind turning back in on itself'. This is a return to a more more open engagement with something

7 Walter Benjamin
'The Work of Art in the Age of
Mechanical Reproduction', 1936

8 Susan Bright
Art Photography Now
Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 10

9 'Reputations:
An Interview with Terry Jones'
Eye, Winter 1998

located at the very beginning of photography; something that Walter Benjamin identified in his 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. 'The camera,' Benjamin explains, 'introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses'.[7] In a world where image surface is increasingly insecure, Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' offers a location for meaning.

The levitation in the LaRoache Brothers' 2011 editorial 'Holy Rollers', or the euphoric reverie of Chadwick Tyler's 2009 portrait of Constance Jablonski for *Grey II* are a reminder of the power of raw spectacle, but they also direct us towards Benjamin's unseen plane. The visualisation of these internal spaces, as Susan Bright explains in *Art Photography Now*, gives rise to things that before the photograph 'existed only in dreams – things that had never consciously been seen, let alone produced'.[8] It draws photographers towards a blurred boundary where meaning is immersed in mystery and the ephemeral, and the only concrete reality is the raw emotion of the subject. It is evoked in different ways in different hands – in the kaleidoscopic lens flare of Serge Leblon, the slow shutter speeds of Bruno Dayan, or the delicate symbolism of Paola Kudacki. Fashion photography has returned as an emotional spokesperson for the mind.

Through this process, the real is made fantastic. In his portraits of Sevillan flamenco dancers, Ruven Afanador uses the symbolism and uniform of their art to articulate an energy that comes from within. Yelena Yemchuk meanwhile plants the romance of fashion squarely in the centre of the kinds of environments that 'incorporate the distilled signs of "real" life', suburban cityscapes and domestic interiors – locations 'within which narratives of the everyday could be plausibly staged'.[8] Hawkins' images feel like a gloriously plasticised fantasy, yet her source material is as 'straight-up' real as Knight's skinheads. Any artifice is a product of the individual in question. It is a celebration of the audacity of self-expression; the emotional vigour is written all over the faces of her willing collaborators, depicted with an outrageous positivity. She even indulges in it herself, making herself up as Dolly Parton in 'Dolly Parton is my Religion' to express her own playful ideals and desires.

The power of physical appearance as an assertion of the internal map of the individual is particularly prescient in a cultural moment where social identity has, for the first time, become inextricably linked with virtual manifestations of ourselves. It started with avatars to the human self in shared online worlds in which the individual could refashion their own image as they saw themselves inside their own heads – in effect, their own models to aspiration. The emergence of social networks has encouraged virtual identities and the selective editing of personal histories, refined to match the way we view ourselves in our own perfect worlds. In this construction of identity there can be found parallels with the role of fashion as an indicator of inner hopes, fears, beliefs and aspirations. This echoes Terry Jones' suggestion that 'fashion is not just about clothes; it's about how you think;' that in an 'outward expression' that marks a transient moment, 'you can be successful in your own right by expressing yourself'.[9] The question of constructed identities may raise some troubling questions, but here, at least, those questions are brought out into the open. The relationship between the real and the imagined, as a result, offers an optimistic message for fashion and its role in the vitality of self-expression.

The revolutions in the pioneering style magazines of the last twenty years have left another legacy too: the democratisation of the photographic process; the increased focus on the mutual relationships between photographer, stylist, model and audience. Collaboration repeatedly asserts itself. The lessons of stylists such as Corinne Day, who introduced personal intimacy to the fashion shoot, have been absorbed, dismantling the hierarchy of the creative process. Now, the stylist has become an integral part – Nicola Formichetti, whose diverse collaborators in this volume include Tim Richardson, Pierre Debusschere and Takahiro Ogawa, has enough credibility to take centre stage on the November 2012 cover of

POP. Alongside this is the ongoing evolution of the relationship between photographer and model to something more creatively codependent. This is another step in a gradual process. In the 1960s, David Bailey was already pushing in this more intimate direction, foreshadowing the realist photography of the nineties with his shots of models such as Jean Shrimpton, who took control of her own identity in front of his lens. Bailey's technique, to encourage the model to let loose and fire away with the camera as they did so, gave voice to the subject and was the first step in breaking down the uncomfortable tradition of the photographer-male and woman-as-object. Nineties-era realism suggested that the relationship between photographer and subject was even more up-close and intimate; sometimes uncomfortably up-close. If the camera has withdrawn from that claustrophobic proximity, the potential for the model to 'speak' before it has become dominant.

With this new freedom, it is as if fashion photography is able to enjoy itself again; to indulge in escapism with a knowing awareness of its own role in a bigger picture. Technological proliferation has created a layered lattice of multiple meanings; identity has multiplied into virtual spaces, and fashion photography is channeling the levelled playing field of this complex new world with a considered awareness of its entire history. How best to sum up this turbulent yet intoxicating moment? Nick Knight's photograph of Lady Gaga provides a neat visual answer. His subject is iconic; she represents a generation and a moment but her self-presentation has repeatedly been reborn in the fashion media, the mainstream and independent press. She traverses boundaries of style and taste that confuse her identity. Knight's answer is to echo this exhilarating impermanence in a photograph in which she appears to move sluggishly under the weight of her endlessly shifting identity. Self and image are in a continual discourse with each other; moving, mutating, ever revising a transient point. She is the embodiment of Habermacher's 'expression of momentum', the outward assertion of the individual in the face of the multiplicity of meanings and realities that define a social era in transition.

A NOTE ABOUT THE COLLECTION

In this volume, the contemporary practice of photographers who have helped to shape the current moment appear alongside emergent artists who operate at the boundaries of experimentation, sometimes in collaboration with those pioneers. It is a hierarchy-free space, reflecting the collaborative process of contemporary photography, something that is occuring between artists and generations. It weaves an international path across territories, organised not by alphabet but by thematic arrangement, drawing conceptual and visual parallels that shift loosely throughout. In doing so it attempts to generate thought-provoking associations and encourage new discussions about the role of fashion photography in the context of the twenty-first century.