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Aesthetics and Politics of the Fashion Image: A Queer Perspective

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Abstract. This essay theorizes the fashion photographic image as a privileged site for queer sensory experience. It takes the stance that the aesthetic engagement with the fashion image occurs through sensation, and more precisely, through a haptic and periperformative experience that activates desires, meanings, and fantasies. Through the circulation of feelings sparked via the sensorial experiencing of the photo, queer subjects can sense belongings and form affiliations that bind them in an egalitarian community of sense exceeding sexual and social differences. A queer theory of fashion photography does not posit that the photographic image may foster propositional knowledge in the viewers, but rather that it moves them to engage corporeally with the image and triggers their imagination to configure new affective modes of being in the world.

Keywords. Fashion image, photography, affect, queer theory, queer aesthetics, aesthetic community.

Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est la façon dont, en traçant des lignes, en disposant des mots ou en répartissant des surfaces, on dessine aussi des partages de l'espace commun. C'est la manière dont, en rassemblant des mots ou des formes, on ne définit pas simplement des formes de l'art mais certaines configurations du visible et du pensable, certaines formes d'habitation du monde sensible.
Jacques Rancière (2003)

INTRODUCTION

Fashion images have always been a «dream factory»¹ endowing contemporary cultures and publics with an arena for collective

¹ I am borrowing this expression from film theorist Brett Farmer [2000].

identifications and fantasmatic escapes. They provide an archive of affects and a fertile terrain of investments and identifications inasmuch as they simultaneously offer a glimpse into the fictional lives of the models-characters and a promise of escapism from the aesthetic, sexual, and social norms embedded in society. The photograph is, indeed, an elective site of attachment: it can bind viewers by fostering identification with a certain subject, context, or sensibility.

Fashion photography, in seizing upon looks, clothing and affects as a means of refashioning pre-existing modes of masculine and feminine representations, often cuts against normative protocols of monolithic identities as well as gender, sexual and emotional intelligibility, thereby proposing new styles through which to perform and negotiate identity. It may convey a queer sensibility insofar as it circulates non-normative styles of masculinities and femininities as well as modes of (non-) relationality that are often at odds with heteronormative parameters.

Let us take for instance the so-called «grunge» or «trashy realist» aesthetic in the fashion photography of the late 1990s. Photographs within this sub-genre have seduced the viewers into the negativity of existence, calling them to grapple with affective scenes that were not necessarily aspirational, happy, or morally «good». Not only did the androgynous models in these photos not conform to general standards of femininity and masculinity, thereby unfolding for the viewer novel possibilities of queer embodiment, but also the portrayal of exhausted characters signalled a lack of affect which was nevertheless revealing of the «emotionless emotion and passionate detachment» that led these figures to embody a style of disidentification² with the dominant social system (Wallerstein

² This term is used by Butler to describe the psychoanalytic phenomenon of a «disavowed identification»: an identification that has been unconsciously made and denied. In her words, disidentification is «an identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it» (Butler [1993]: 112). Slavoj Žižek (Žižek [1991]) has construed disidentification as a collapse of political possibility, a *fictionalization* that immobilizes the politi-

[2015]: 147). They have been read as queer in that through their physical thinness they expressed the refusal of category completion, namely of being gendered and sexualized by inhabiting childhood or adulthood (Wallerstein [2015]: 142-143).

The subjects (intended, from a cognitivist perspective, as characters, i.e., as analogs of human agents) portrayed in the fashion photography of the 1990s disengaged from the expectation of attaining wholesomeness and fulfilment by making oneself available to, and therefore pandering to, the bio-political mandates of normative living. Thus, the fashion photograph can function as a medium through which to express visions and affective states that are dislodged from societal affective imperatives. Leaving aside its commercial goals, the production of a fashion photograph constitutes a visual attempt to present attitudes and affective tonalities that might orchestrate the intimate collective identifications of the viewers, hence sparking a sense of belonging through the imagination of a world that is close enough to and yet other than their own.

As countless examples like the above would illustrate, fashion images have the potential to articulate queer aesthetics that both resonate with and shape their publics. It is within the amalgamation of cultural production and feelings generated in the viewer that, according to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, «queerness becomes a question of identification» (Berlant, Warner [1995]: 347). This is not to say, obviously, that fashion photographs are only consumed by queer publics, but rather, that they present aesthetic and affective orientations to the world that can be considered queer in that they stretch the boundaries of masculinity and femininity as well as the rhetorics of emotional positivity and intelligibility that are advocated within mainstream society.

In this essay I posit that the issue of sexual

cal. Rancière's account of disidentification is aligned, instead, with that of queer theory. He considers *désidentification* the primary effect of the aesthetic gesture, for it is at the core of the process of *subjectivization* (Rancière [1992]: 61; Idem [1995]).

identity (or, as I will refer to it, of «queerness») is displaced through the fashion photographic image onto the register of sensation and that a queer sensorial understanding of the fashion image enables us to construe it as a site for the production and investment of queer meanings, desires, and fantasies, which can be mobilized in everyday life by taking up new attitudes and orientations towards matters of aesthetics and social and affective life.

1. A QUEER SENSORY EXPERIENCE

Queer theory has privileged, recently, a study of images (and aesthetic forms in general) that phenomenologically foregrounds queer sensory experience. Two concepts that have been mobilized within queer theory to account for an affective engagement with the photographic image are periperformativity and hapticity.

Eve Sedgwick pointed out that J.L. Austin's performative utterances «invoke a presumption [...] of a consensus between speaker and witness, and to some extent between all of them and the addressee». The performative statement is inherently normative insofar as it interpellates an audience whose consensus with the normative values that underlie the speaker's utterance is taken for granted (Sedgwick [2003]: 69). Sedgwick shifted the focus of the performative to the space and the audience surrounding the addressor and the addressee of a said utterance (such as «I dare you» or the «I do» of the marriage vow): this neighboring space is precisely where individuals who self-identify as queer³ might mark their elusion or disidentification from the invisible scripts enacted by state or religious authority as these are rhetorically subsumed in the performative utterance.

In the face of the normativity embedded in performative utterances, Sedgwick's theorization

of *periperformativity* is a queer attempt to «disinterpellate from a performative scene» henceforth unsettling the ideology to which our consensus is presumed (Sedgwick [2003]: 70). As a mode of disinterpellation, the periperformative indexes «the grammar in which affect and subjectivity can be explicitly brought into relation with issues of performative force» (Sedgwick [2011]: 58). The salience of the periperformative lies in its affect-laden potentiality of allowing the subjects to carve out a peripheral space of disidentification from the regulative chain of normalcy that hovers over their existence.

In photography, the periperformative refers to an imaginative affective scene that extends beyond and takes place at the borders of the photograph or, using Sedgwick's words, «in the neighbourhood of» its frame. Its fruitfulness for the description of an image can be grasped in view of recent queer interpretations of *La chambre claire* (Barthes [1980]) which have foregrounded the affective component of our aesthetic engagement with images. It has been observed that Barthes's work articulates in a haptic language of feeling (in that his own experience of photographs is a tactile one of *being touched*) a queer theory of photography wherein «feeling opens the index onto other worlds, collapses disparate times, and conjoins the material and the spiritual» (Smith [2014]: 30). In this light, the *punctum* constitutes a gesture that projects the viewers' desire outside of the visual boundaries of the photograph enabling them to see and feel what lies beyond the visible by casting them into queer asynchrony, i.e., a temporality that feels out of joint (Smith [2014]). This points to a configuration of the photographic image as affectively periperformative: in its extension beyond the semiotic, photography suggests the possibility of an aesthetic experience that via the viewer's imagination may have an impact beyond itself. Such a formulation of what a photograph is and does may enrich discourses on the rhetoric of the photographic medium with a speculation on its ontology.

The periperformative nature of the fashion photographic image emerges as its parameters are

³ Queer refers to «the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses, and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically» (Sedgwick [2011]: 188).

undermined by atmospheric effects that envelop the spectators in a lateral space of queer imagery and modes of being together that could be reenacted in everyday life, thereby envisioning «new ways to attach to the world» (Berlant, Prosser [2011]: 182). The fashion photograph can, thus, be construed as a periperformative genre insofar as it operates within the same space as the aesthetic production of norms (of beauty, gender, and demeanour), namely, the space of consumerist culture and, more narrowly, the context of the magazine or the fashion industry more broadly; however, its rhetorical force lies in the capacity to displace and mobilize those very norms. Operating within the boundaries of its ideological address⁴, it stretches such boundaries by promoting in the viewer an affective encounter with the image that evades the mere commercial function of product advertising.

John Paul Ricco has suggested that photographs can operate periperformatively for they gesture beyond the photographic frame towards a blind field of affective experiences. This *extra* of the photographic image enables the mobilization of desire beyond the visible. In the fashion photographic image, this subtle beyond is identifiable in what Sedgwick termed «tactile plus emotional» (Sedgwick [2003]: 17), namely, a particular intimacy that subsists between emotions and the textural quality of the photograph that triggers our haptic engagement. In the production of a fashion photographic image, the choice of camera angles, the type of focus, and, in the age of the internet the adoption of post-production technologies, are devices aimed at enhancing the tactile and sensual properties of clothing as a way to evoke sensory responses, that is, to stimulate an embodied involvement in the beholder. This mimetic capacity of the image to animate clothing through various representational registers is at the core of the

⁴ The «ideological address» consists of «complex orchestrations of spectatorial desire, projection, identification, fetishism, voyeurism, and all the other psychic mechanisms that account for the power, the influence, and indeed the pleasure such pictures produce» (Solomon-Godeau [2004]: 195).

epistemic stimulation triggered by haptic visibility (Pecorari [forthcoming 2019])⁵.

Following Giuliana Bruno's intuition, the image is sartorial in that not only is it *designed* but also it *designs* through its textural materiality the folds of our «emotional landscape» (Bruno [2016]). That is to say that we are involved in the *folds* of the image and in such interaction, wherein our *sensorium* is engaged, we can feel emotionally transformed. The sartorial and chromatic qualities of the dresses that we encounter in the fashion photographic image, for instance, enfold us in an affective interaction that tunes our aesthetic experience. These qualities contribute to shaping an affective atmosphere in which we are immersed. There is, indeed, according to Deleuze, a connection between the folds of clothing and the texture of our psychic interiority: the former exert a spiritual force over our body, folding and modulating its inside (Deleuze [1988]). By touching the surface of the fashion photographic image with our eyes we are corporeally implicated in the matter of the image itself.

In his work on Francis Bacon, Deleuze explained that the painter did not ascribe aesthetic value to the photograph on the grounds of its inability to encompass within the «sensation» (which, for Bacon, coincides with the affect that determines instinct) different constitutive orders of sensation, or, levels of feeling (Deleuze [1981]). What Bacon meant by «order» or «level» in relation to sensation is unclear and Deleuze proposes different hypotheses. The phenomenological hypothesis is that these orders would be domains of sensation peculiar to different sense organs. If we were to embrace this hypothesis it would ensue that according to Bacon the communication, or passage, from one sense to another is not made possible by the photograph insofar as interlaced sensations relative to colour, touch, smell, noise, and others could not possibly be conveyed by the photographer (as, instead, the painter is able to do on his canvas).

⁵ On the concept of haptic visibility, see Marks [2000]: 161.

Contrary to such an understanding of the photograph as merely figurative, I suggest that in the case of the fashion photographic image there is not a reduction to a single level of sensation. In view of its constitutive hapticity, the fashion image may herald a cross-modal interaction wherein we feel like we are both touching and are being touched on multiple levels. By way of an example, fashion photographs, which historically have a cinematic quality, can visualize silence or noise, the palpability or impalpability of a fabric, the sense of its colour, and so forth. Moreover, I wish to further the suggestion that when we touch fabrics with our eyes we are inevitably touched back in the form of an «affective return» (Bruno [2010]) — which conjures Spinoza's formulation of *affectus* as the simultaneous capacity to affect and to be affected — by arguing that the fashion photographic image relies on this haptic source also as a way to trigger lateral desires and fantasies across what can be considered the periperformative field of aesthetic engagement. This marks the possibility of thinking about a sensory epistemology in relation to queer experience rooted in the idea that the tactile experience of fashion photographic images activates queer imaginings and meanings. Sensory engagement is functional, on the one hand, to the mobilization of the viewers' desire in the direction of eventually purchasing the products displayed in the picture, and on the other, of sparking their imagination towards the formation of lateral fantasies.

I have outlined, thus far, two quintessential aspects of the fashion image. First, the periperformative as the gesture that, acting in the vicinity of norms, exceeds them, hence opening up a space for both critiquing the terms under which the aforementioned norms are constituted and exercising the regulative power of interpellating their audiences. The allusion of the fashion photograph to an imaginative beyond, a dream-like imaginative escape, could thus be an opportunity for marginalized subjects to recast new meanings and reconfigure the *beyond* of the image as a site of ambivalence and indeterminacy that generates pleasure.

Second, fashion photographs, through their focalization on the enhancement of the textural qualities of the image, activate a queer sensory experience that consists in involving the viewers through their tactile and affective fascination with the vibrant properties of the image. This kind of sensory experience, in addition to inducing bodily awareness also induces «novel forms of subjectivity»; such photographs, in fact, «develop a vocabulary of sensory experience that supplies the means to imagine — to collectively sense — the animating textures of queer subjectivity» (Seitler [2014]: 57). This suggests queerness as a mode of knowledge formation that operates via feeling rather than rationality: such an affective engagement in the experience of the photographic image may enable alternative possibilities of (queer) affective embodiment.

2. TOWARD A QUEER AESTHETIC COMMUNITY

By speaking of queerness I foreground the capacity of aesthetic representations to cut across axes of difference and shape imaginative relations that are not necessarily implicated in queer publics but that, however, presuppose an urge for transformative ethical views on the matter of social and emotional life. In other words, visual representations (and art, in general) might unite different individuals through their differences as well as their shared frictions with dominant cultures⁶. This does not imply an obliteration of the specificities of gay, lesbian, trans and other subjectivities. However, although I am persuaded that such positionings do influence one's identifications in the

⁶ In this vein, film theorist Alexander Doty has proposed queerness «as a mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity» and has explained that his uses of the terms «queer readings», «queer discourses» and «queer positions» are attempts «to account for the existence and expression of a wide range of positions within culture that are queer or non-, anti-, or contra-straight» (Doty [1991]: 2-3).

aesthetic experience and therefore should not be dismissed on the grounds of being essentialist categories, as has often happened (e.g. Evans, Gaman [1995]), I also believe that an ethically productive engagement with potentially queer visual representations is not premised axiomatically on a gay or lesbian identification.

Photographic representations in fact can themselves be responsible for shaping identifications and fantasies that might have a shared transformative impact, albeit resonating differently based on the viewer's subjectivity. Phrased differently, I am concerned with how queer identifications are produced in terms of collective experiences rather than how they are assumed in the subject's personal engagement. This points to a possible formulation of queer identification not as a pre-given, presupposed and implicated, mode of engaging in the aesthetic experience of specifically gay, lesbian, or trans-identified subjects, but rather as a collective endeavour that has the potential to open a horizon of affective and aesthetic possibilities in line with what Judith Butler had termed «the not yet real», namely, that futural or alternative dimension of the real that is envisioned by theory as a means to problematize the real itself (Butler [1990])⁷. My suggestion that fashion photographs unfold sensorial possibilities of approaching the world *queerly* is germane to the idea that the aesthetic moment can potentially generate collective transformations which become instances of «world-making» (Berlant, Warner [1998]: 558).

Christopher Castiglia and Russ Castronovo have elaborated this line of thinking arguing that

⁷ It should be added that, according to Butler, it is when the phantasmatic and the real become conflated that the phantasmatic effects its power more efficaciously. For Butler, the phantasmatic is a dimension, or a posture, of the real, i.e., a «psychic reality» that is inclusive of the real. At the same time, the phantasmatic troubles the boundaries of stable identities. In this sense, fantasy is particularly important (both in everyday life and in our theoretical practice) as it allows us to identify with multiple and shifting positions, thereby enacting the subject's fragmentation and dissimulation as well as questioning the locatability of identity (Butler [1990]: 105-106).

«aesthetics contain the possibility of articulating differences, not in a namby-pamby mode of liberal retreat but in a manner that radically reconfigures reconciliation so that it can no longer secure stability or an identity that rests on oneness». They invoked a study of aesthetics «which traffics in affective sensations that promise — without necessarily providing — post-identity or non-normative forms of collectivism», that is, a study that is imaginative and generative of non-hegemonic collective identifications (Castiglia, Castronovo [2004]: 426-428). Thus, aesthetics can produce different articulations of one's identity as well as new worldviews (or, *orientations* to the world). Along this trajectory, affect is a crucial component for it bridges the distance between us, as spectators and possible members of queer publics, and the aesthetic object. Emotional experience is what imaginatively and queerly unites us, especially when the aesthetic experience is one that violates our background assumptions and reveals, or exposes us to, unknown aspects of our identities (Dawes [2004]).

This kind of aesthetic-affective approach is ultimately aimed at imagining forms of post-identitarian collectivism. Dana Seitler has embraced this endeavour in her investigation of queer photography (Seitler [2014]). Endorsing a Kantian understanding of the aesthetic as a collective sensual activity that defies normative rationality and produces knowledge by way of feeling, Seitler is committed to thinking about queer aesthetics as independent from the constraints of identity politics (for instance, defining an aesthetic as queer simply because it directly references queer subjects or because the latter employs it) and to conceiving of queerness as produced through aesthetic forms in order to grasp «how a queer aesthetic functions at the various intersections of sensory experience, imagined collectivity, and the material world» (Seitler [2014]: 53).

A redeployment of Kantian aesthetics for queer theoretical purposes can be read in virtue of its commitment to accounting for how formal qualities trigger the *sensorium* in the viewing subjects as well as the imaginative process stemming from sensory experience. Indeed, paraphrasing

Nancy, the Kantian imagination figures a faculty of images that are appresentative and apperceptive, it is constitutive or generative of its objects, hence it produces knowledge. This is a kind of knowledge that is shaped through the image, wherein the imagination presents subjects and objects, the imaginable and the unimaginable (Nancy [2003]: 177). Being a purveyor of knowledge, imagination opens for new views on ourselves as subjects (insofar as imagination allows for a *self-imagining*), on others, and on the world.

Through an affective engagement with the aesthetic, the viewer is virtually connected to other viewers. This conjures Kant's claim that aesthetic contemplation generates a sensuous experience that is concomitantly individual and collective. Precisely, the link between the individual and the community is furnished through the «universal communicability» produced in the subjects by the aesthetic object. By way of an imagined transmission of «sensual enjoyment», the aesthetic constitutes us as a «community of feeling subjects» (Seitler [2014]). This idea, which queers Kant's theorization of the aesthetic as a space wherein individuals can experience their openness to freedom in the world, that is, a freedom that unites them in a community of taste based on individual consent, reveals a construal of art as a non-autonomous sphere in which queer collective formations are made possible.

Such a formulation can be aligned with Nancy's ethical theorization of the photographic image as a mode of exposure to being-in-common. The image turns us towards the other, thereby confronting us with otherness. We share the image with others and within this sharing (*partager*), we are put in touch. Thus, the image grounds the constitution of the subject in the act of sharing in the other. Put differently, the image sets the scene for our being-in-common (insofar as, according to Nancy's social ontology, being is always being-with), it is a medium that engages us with (the alterity of) one another as a community, as a *nous autres* (Nancy [2003]). It is salient at this point to underscore that for Nancy our *contact* with one another occurs through the image by way of

a hallucinatory exposure to strangeness, that is, through a flight into the strangeness that is inherent to the familiar. The photograph defamiliarizes: it strays us into strangeness, estranging us from within the familiar. In this shared estrangement, we are (*other* from each other and yet we are) *in common*: photography has, thus, the purpose of exposing us to a sense of community, which does not imply a communal fusion, but rather retains one's singularity in a shared aesthetic space.

This uncanny logic, which grounds the epistemic potential of the photograph in its constitutive exposure, or exteriority, to otherness (rather than, say, in its indexicality) (Kaplan [2010]) is attuned to a phenomenology of queerness that conceives of estrangement as a modality of disorientation from the linear temporality that organizes (the productivity and reproductivity of) our lives. Thus, images can carve out or inspire orientations prompting subjects to forge relations and create spaces that have a queer configuration, thereby potentially defying the normative directionality that conventionally orients one's own thriving in the world⁸. We are not simply thrown into the world, but we can actively shape, *queerly*, our wordly arrangements by attaching ourselves to, and being invested in objects that are telling of our desires and, more broadly, of our identities⁹. Queerness is, indeed, about those aesthet-

⁸ These ideas disclose the Heideggerian import, which is also central in Nancy's thought, within queer phenomenology. In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger spoke about disorientation, through the example of walking blindfolded in a dark room, as a way to explain the idea of familiarity with the world: it is through the feeling of familiarity that our body chooses in which direction to be orientated. Sara Ahmed has queered this idea by suggesting that the question of orientation becomes a question of finding one's own way in the world, one's own sense of feeling at home, and, ultimately, shaping the world one wants to inhabit (Ahmed [2006]: 7-8).

⁹ Merleau-Ponty had already suggested that moments of disorientation are about an experience of disorder that may unfold a sense of vitality or giddiness (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 296). As was noted by Sara Ahmed, insights like this in the tradition of phenomenology are already inherently queer in that they forecast the possibility of

ic moments in which the world is experienced obliquely. It is ultimately about one's aesthetic disposition towards the objects of the world, that is, one's ability to performatively express desires, form attachments, and shape spaces, eventually evading, phenomenally, the normative scripts that seek to regulate how such practices should be oriented.

As I have suggested earlier, a queer aesthetic relationality can be materialized through sensory experience. In our engagement with fashion photographic images, this translates to a corporeal experience of collective attunement to the image, of perception of its palpability (which is precisely what Sedgwick meant by «tactile plus emotional»). By postulating the aesthetic as a potentially queer overture to collectivized forms of solidarity, queerness emerges forcefully in terms of an affective relatedness to the world, pointing in the direction of an imaginative collective orientation via the mobilization of desires and fantasies. In other words, while queerness unfolds through aesthetic relationality it also alludes to futural horizons of experience.

Queerness is inherently projected into the future (Muñoz [2009])¹⁰ for it is a collective doing, a performative work toward the enactment of concrete possibilities of another world, a critical practice that seeks to invent new worlds¹¹. It is a potentiality that is eminent as an affective mode of non-being, and, like Butler's concept of «not yet real» suggests, it needs to be materialized in the present. Rancière has unpacked this double relation between present and future in relation to the aesthetic community, arguing that on the one hand artistic practices can weave together, affectively, a community of sense, and on the other,

freely resignifying one's own directedness towards objects of desire. It is not a coincidence that queer is already, after all, a spatial term (meaning «twistedness») which gets translated into a sexual term (Ahmed [2006]: 67).

¹⁰ Muñoz's formulation of queerness as «futurity» is largely informed by Husserl's phenomenological concept of «horizons of being» (Husserl [1930]).

¹¹ The idea of queer as a «practice» was originally formulated by Sedgwick (Sedgwick [1993]: 3).

they can anticipate and mediate the reality of a new people. Through the production of connections and disconnections, aesthetic experience «reframe[s] the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are «equipped» for fitting it» and — thinking through the aforementioned Deleuzian concept of the fold — it creates «a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible» (Rancière [2008]: 11).

The role of queer aesthetics is, then, to map out social relations and worldviews as well as propel their affective transmission and dissemination to the publics. Seen from this angle, the aesthetic gesture might actualize collective utopias by conceptualizing new worlds (via an act of «queer world-making») that are unconstrained by heteronormativity. For example, the visual representation of unconventional body types and attitudes can dislodge desire from the dominant imprints that organize dominant erotic imagination, and can gesture towards the experience of new forms of inclusionary belonging and collectivity (Muñoz [1999]). By pursuing an affective reconfiguration of the present, queer aesthetics seeks to unearth «the affective resources for *otherwiseness* that exists both in the realms of the aesthetic and the quotidian»¹².

Such an understanding of the queer aesthetic act as instrumental to envisioning new worldviews and forms of life by way of annexing people into a common aesthetic *sensorium* is inevitably political. By de-privileging an engagement with the indexicality of the image and replacing this with a sen-

¹² The concept of «otherwiseness» is derived from Adorno's idea of an ethical aesthetic that can suggest the «otherwise». As part of his materialist analysis of aesthetics, Adorno wrote: «Even in the most sublimated work of art there is a hidden “it should be otherwise”. When a work is merely itself and no other thing, as in a pure pseudo-scientific construction, it becomes bad art — literally pre-artistic. [...] As eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art [...] point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life» (Adorno [1962]: 195).

sory (haptic and periperformative) interaction, I am recasting a queer aesthetics that unearths the not-yet-real in the fashion photographic image by way of establishing imaginative affective relations among its publics. A queer community of sense would, thus, cultivate an ethics of being-in-common that values the intimacy of shared feelings over sexual, social, or other kinds of distinctions. In this sense, queer aesthetics bring about new possibilities for what Rancière termed *le partage du sensible*, ultimately aiming to a redefinition of «une texture nouvelle de la vie commune» (Rancière [2003]: 111).

By foregrounding the register of sensation, queer aesthetics insists upon the possibility of contributing to a sensible reorganization of the social world (Williford [2009]: 11). Within this framework, the fashion image is a possible function of the social order insofar as it participates in a queer (re-)ordering of the sensible. With its constitutive queerness, it may call into question the dominant order by way of partaking in the sensible partition of the world, which is indeed the foundational logic of said order. The political dimension of the fashion image lies, indeed, in its aesthetic capacity to present scenes that legitimize multiple ways of seeing, feeling, and being in the world.

CONCLUSIONS

Fashion photographic images, by relying on the strategy of instilling desire and fantasy in the viewers circulate affects that can be both telling of the lived experiences of their publics and envision for them new modes of inhabiting the world by stimulating ways of performing, experimenting with, or articulating new identities. In this capacity, they carry the potential to cultivate the collective fantasy of living outside the traditional modes of sociality in which bodies are charted according to traditional paradigms that circumscribe the fluid and ever-shifting experiences of sexuality, affectivity, and sociality.

My understanding of the fashion photographic image is aligned with a theoretical trajectory that

frames the aesthetic as a collectivized attempt to unfurl queerness in its ability to do debate normative worldviews. It is my belief that we, as viewers, by engaging our senses could fruitfully use fashion images as a point of departure for broader inquiries into the world in which we, as well as the images, find ourselves. Images, in fact, can offer an understanding of the affective modes of relationality put in place within society as well as potentially envision new ones. Fashion photographic images, on the one hand, engender an affective engagement of subjects and aesthetic objects that is at the core of the process of imagining alternative queer futures and scenarios, and on the other, they operate as a mobile site for potentially multiple and ever-shifting performative enactments of queer desires and subjectivities.

In conclusion, it is my contention that the fashion photograph is an elective site through which to affirm the fluidity of queer orientations in the form of an exchange between what and how is represented in the images themselves and what and how is grasped by the viewers. I have argued that this kind of aesthetic engagement takes place through the register of sensation, namely, through a haptic experience triggering feelings that by mirroring the intimacy of our drives, desires, and fantasies, unite us in an imaginative affective community that transcends political and social differences.

Fashion photographs, alongside other visual media, invite the viewers to be more curious in their ordinary life about what exceeds aesthetic, affective, and sexual norms as well as to try on different attitudes toward the world. That is, they might compel the viewers to rethink their self — phenomenologically, as embodied subjectivity — in relation to various styles of being in the world. Queer viewers engaging with this kind of aesthetic works might feel united in their respective differences from each other under the sign of a shared antinormative ethos. The fashion image can, thus, be read in terms of queer collective attachment and imaginative world-making insofar as it may enact forms of public intimacy by virtually linking viewers through a shared sensory experience.

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