
Subverting the gaze: the voyeuristic, fetishised spectacle of Karl Lagerfeld's *Pirelli Calendar* (2011)

Beschara Karam

Abstract

The highly prized and rarefied *Pirelli Calendar* 2011 was released in Moscow in December 2010. Simply titled *Mythology*, it was conceptualised, developed and photographed by internationally renowned fashion designer and *artiste* Karl Lagerfeld. It comprises 36 black and white photographs of models and one actress (Julianne Moore) representing mythical characters (including gods, demigods, heroes and muses) from the ancient Graeco-Roman world. Among these, figures such as Apollo, Achilles, Echo and even Zeus are to be found. In this article I elucidate how Karl Lagerfeld has sexually objectified these numinous deities, epic heroes and heroines and thrust them into the domain of highbrow erotica. Furthermore, I aim to analyse the re-representation and re-articulation of these characters both in terms of gender and sex. Described by Lagerfeld as his 'visual version of Homer' (Malpas 2010), I will critique his photographs through the use of Laura Mulvey's (1975/2000) seminal concept of the 'male gaze'. The argument will also claim that through his camera lens, Lagerfeld has interrogated the *status quo* of masculinity and femininity. In doing so, he has challenged heteronormative ideologies and instead presented a *Calendar* of many gazes: heterosexual; bisexual; homosexual; masculine; and feminine: intimating that sex is always a contested norm and a continuous negotiation.

Key words: Laura Mulvey; *Pirelli Calendar*; fetish; *Mythology*; 'male gaze'; Karl Lagerfeld; subversion; heteronormative sexuality; voyeurism

Introduction

In an article entitled 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (2000,¹ originally 1975) — Laura Mulvey, a feminist author, psychoanalyst and film maker — borrows concepts and ideas from the fields of psychoanalysis and structuralism and argues that classical and mainstream Hollywood films represent women as the passive recipients of the 'male gaze'. In this seminal work, she argues that male characters are 'bearers of the look' which is aimed, most predominantly at physically desirable, sexually passive and submissive female characters. Not only that, but also that we, the audience, watch cinema through the eyes of these dominant male protagonists and are implicitly addressed as though we, too, are desiring of these heterosexual, heteronormative pleasures. Using her seminal work as a frame of discourse, this article hermeneutically critiques Lagerfeld's 2011 *Pirelli Calendar*, simply titled *Mythology*. The article begins with an historical overview of the *Pirelli Calendar*; briefly discusses Lagerfeld's conceptualisation of his work, explicates Mulvey's theory of the 'male gaze', critiques Mulvey's seminal article, and lastly, analyses 14 black and white photographs from *Mythology*.

Historical overview of the *Pirelli Calendar*

In 1964, the tyre company Pirelli decided to elevate the traditional 'girly calendar' to a new artistic height (Pirelli Calendar History... 2009). Conventionally, this calendar was created for truck drivers and common car (male) owners based on the simple premise that 'sex sells', and comprised naked or semi-naked women draped over different vehicles. Pirelli decided to make it a collaborative aesthetic endeavour by pairing the most famous photographers of the decade with the most famous supermodels and actors. They further rarefied the result by making the calendar literally priceless: you cannot buy the *Calendar*.² With only 20,000 copies produced a year, it is bestowed on one: only the richest, most influential and famous of individuals are the recipients, while plebeians are relegated to hearing about it or being able to peruse a few select media releases, although Lagerfeld's edition was made available on the internet. The selection of both photographer and then his/her miscellany of models are highly anticipated and hugely prestigious.³

There are several observations about previous *Pirelli Calendar* editions from which important deductions can be made: there is an abundance of semi-nudity (female), with a focus on breasts and the female *derrière*, with few full-frontal nude photographs, although all include careful concealment of female genitalia (Lagerfeld's edition is the first to show full-frontal nudity). The models are sexually and provocatively posed and they deploy poses normally associated with the 'girly calendar' in terms of style and (semi) nudity. Supermodels and actors such as Sophia Loren, Penelope Cruz, Kate Moss, and Cindy Crawford⁴ are photographed by famous photographers such as Bruce Weber (2003), Annie Leibowitz (2000),⁵ and

Terry Richardson (2010).⁶ Many editions are artistically themed, such as Patrick Demarchelier's 2008 edition, whose *leitmotif* was the *Pearl of the Orient*⁷ and Richardson's ecology-focused 2010 edition set in prominent Brazilian locations. Men have been included in a few editions, including actors Ewan McGregor, Bono and Kris Kristofferson.⁸ However, in keeping with the largely male audience, they are a rare occurrence, and the focus of every edition is very obviously female nudity. Interestingly, there are never any photographs including *Pirelli* tyre products. There are only suggestive references made such as with the 1984 Uwe Ommers edition,⁹ where gold tyre marks were provocatively painted onto a model's *derrière*.

In April 2010 the Chairman of Pirelli tyres Marco Tronchetti Provera announced that the highly prestigious 2011 *Pirelli Calendar* would be photographed by Karl Lagerfeld (Pirelli: in Moscow ... 2010a). Lagerfeld is considered to be a demi-god in the fashion world, with his own very distinct and unique iconography: his startlingly white hair is always combed into a ponytail and he always wears his signature sunglasses, gloves and a formal suit complete with tie (predominantly black). As the head designer of the *House of Coco Chanel* and *Fendi*, he is not commonly known for his photography. This article now briefly describes Lagerfeld's vision of the calendar.

Karl Lagerfeld's *mise-en-scène*

Lagerfeld's *Mythology* contains twenty models¹⁰ and actress Julianne Moore, posing in 36 black and white photographs of mythological characters from ancient Greece and Rome. He conceptualised, choreographed and photographed all of the photographs. He also handcrafted all the gold adornments and jewelry, and made extensive use of gold body paint. Lagerfeld

said that he produced 'the visual version of Homer. I did it with my camera instead of with my pen' (Malpas 2010; Scott 2010). He also stated that his choice of models and actresses brings the demi-gods, nymphs, deities, and heroes 'to life and depict[s] a new conceptualisation of the beautiful' (Pirelli Calendar by Karl Lagerfeld ... 2010). Before critiquing Lagerfeld's creative artistic vision, I frame the theoretical discourse that supports this critique.

The 'male gaze'

Laura Mulvey's framework was selected because it is premised on the argument that spectators of mainstream Hollywood films are predominantly heterosexual males. The same assumption can be made of the 'girly' *Pirelli Calendar*. However, while Lagerfeld does create the *Pirelli Calendar* he also subverts the gaze, through 'bending' or 'queering'. This latter position is supported by the critics of Mulvey, such as Judith Butler (1990), Patricia White (1998), Yvonne Tasker (2006), and Mary Anne Doane (1982). In this article I therefore not only present a critique of the *Pirelli Calendar* as photographed by Lagerfeld and framed by Mulvey, I also problematise Mulvey's argument and positioning of the spectator as heterosexual. Before considering these latter arguments, Mulvey's article is first discussed.

Mulvey's formative article is founded on the work of Sigmund Freud (1982:65; originally 1915), who introduced the concept of 'scopophilia', 'the pleasure in looking' very early on in his psychoanalytic writings. He also posited that pleasure in looking is a human instinct that develops in early childhood when children begin to experience control over their sight and can fix their sight on various objects, such as toys (Freud 1982:65-66, 83, 79, 89, 146, 86, 92, 98-99). Mulvey

(2000:489) argues that narrative cinematic conventions (such as the use of seamless editing, or suture) when understood within the contexts of screening, foster a sense of voyeuristic fantasy in the spectator, similar to that experienced by infants. While women in mainstream Hollywood cinema connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 2000:487), it is the men who are doing the looking. Mulvey clearly argues that it is the female spectators that are excluded from this male-oriented perspective on visual pleasure. Thus, according to Mulvey (2000:487), 'the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure.' In addition to this, the visual pleasure is a heterosexual male pleasure that is both narrow-minded and divisive because it constructs a voyeuristic position for the assumed male spectator suggestive of the stereotypical Peeping Tom (Mulvey 2000:486, 487). This is the 'scopophilic' position, which in a cinematic screening, or dark cinema room, further cultivates this sense of 'voyeuristic fantasy' (Mulvey 2000:486).

Voyeurism, the act of viewing the activities of other individuals unbeknown to them, is therefore illicit or implies illicit or sexualised connotations. Spectators in a cinema theatre derive pleasure from this 'illicit' viewing. Thus the assumption is that the type of visual pleasure constructed by, and enacted in mainstream, narrative cinema is both gendered and sexist (Mulvey 2000). In addition to this, there is the concept of fetishism which refers to the notion of over investment in parts of the body, most especially, and conventionally, the female body. This fetishisation takes place by a fragmentation of the body. Thus in cinema, the breasts or legs of female characters are often 'picked out' by the camera, with close-up shots, or lingering shots, over investing them with meaning. Mulvey (2000:478-479) also references Freud's reliance on the Oedipal Complex and its association with the castration complex.

In addition to borrowing Freud's psychoanalytic concept of scopophilia and infantile pleasurable viewing, Mulvey also draws on the work of Jacques Lacan, examining the notion of identification in mainstream narrative cinema through his 'mirror stage'. Lacan defines this stage as the first time an infant sees their reflection or image in a mirror; when they do so, they consider this image to be more superior — the 'Ideal I' — than themselves (Mulvey 2000:486). Thus, they do not initially identify this image with themselves. Rather, they view their mirror image as more independent than themselves and, as a more 'complete' human being. Mulvey appropriates these concepts to cinema spectatorship, arguing that the cinema screen functions for spectators in the same way that the mirror functions for infants. Spectators are encouraged to identify with the characters that they view on-screen, and to imagine that these characters are superior or ideal mirror reflections of themselves. In this way, characters on screen become 'ego-ideals' or 'screen surrogates' (Mulvey 2000:486, 488) for spectators. Through this identification the audience, as spectators, can live out their fantasies.

However, it is the male protagonist who does the looking that becomes the 'main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify' (Mulvey 2000:488; cf. 2000:490). Female and male spectators are therefore bound to identify with this dominant, heterosexual male character. Mulvey (2000:488) also emphasises that, '[a]ccording to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like'. Not only are men averse to gaze on their own exhibitionist like, but there is furthermore a very particular reason why male heterosexual spectators resort to both voyeurism and fetishisation of the female form. It helps alleviate

their own fears of castration, because this phallogentric view 'depends on the image of the castrated woman' (Mulvey 2000:483). This builds on the Freudian (1982) castration complex, in that, because women lack a penis they represent the threat of castration. However in doing so, they embody 'sexual difference' and are therefore 'icons of pleasure that confirm for men their sex and their sexuality' (Miller 2000:481). One of the ways in which the male spectator overcomes or transcends the castration complex is through voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia of the female form, through which they conceal this fear of castration.

It is usually the exception that female characters in Hollywood mainstream cinema are positioned as bearers of the gaze for the pleasure of female viewers. This concept is also extrapolated to that of the camera gaze: the look of the camera that records the film. So not only do the male characters in the film look at the female characters lustily, but the camera records them as such, objectifying women and representing them as the ideal male fantasy. Thus, according to Mulvey (2000:493), there are three distinct ways of 'looking' associated with the cinema: the camera that records the film (this includes the director and/or producer and/or cameraman), the audience that views the film, and the characters looking at each other within the film illusion. All three 'looks' are positioned as the 'desiring heterosexual male gaze' (Mulvey 2000:488), equating visual pleasure with sexual pleasure but only for the desiring heterosexual male gaze. Thus it can be argued that not only is the spectator the voyeur, but so is the camera. While Mulvey's article has influenced film and media theory, and is often used to deconstruct different visual texts (as is the case here), her approach does have a number of detractors.¹¹ They are considered below, before continuing with where her theoretical discourse is used to frame the critique of *Mythology*.

The primary criticism stems from the fact that Mulvey assumes that *all* spectators are heterosexual. Feminist and queer theorists (cf. Aaron 2006; Butler 1990; Doane 1982; Doty 1998; Tasker 2006; White 1998) critique Mulvey's emphasis on a binary conception of gender that ignores non-heterosexualities. Both bodies of theory argue for the conception of gender as a 'fluid rather than a fixed identity' (Aaron 2006; Ben-Shaul 2007; Butler 1990; Tasker 2006). Patricia White (1998), for example, points out one of the problems associated with assuming that all spectators are heterosexual: heterosexual women cannot enjoy their own image as an object of sexual desire. However, this does not account for lesbian spectators whose voyeuristic pleasure derives from watching women as objects of desire. Similarly, authors Gaylin Studlar (1985) and Mary Anne Doane (1982) argue that Mulvey does not consider the female spectator's scopophilic pleasure. Mulvey (1989) herself attempted to address this oversight in her article 'Afterthoughts on "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema"' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the sun* in which she concluded that female spectators can identify with the male protagonist in its identification with a male figure (and his representation of freedom of the ego). While her argument attempts to reconcile her earlier hypothesis, it still assumes a heterosexual, binary norm. It does not, for instance, suggest the possibility of a lesbian gaze. Doane (1982:81) attempted to overcome Mulvey's arguments and proposed the concept of 'masquerading' as a subversive strategy: '*Masquerade*... constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask – as the decorative layer that which conceals a non-identity'. Doane's concept informed the emergence of post-feminism and queer theories.

Judith Butler is another scholar who critiques this binary, essentialist view of the male/female divide assumed

by Mulvey. In her ground-breaking book *Gender trouble*, Butler (1990:25) extends the post-feminist position on femininity as being 'diverse, split, shifting and polysemic' and she clearly argues that it includes all sexual identities. In addition, Butler critiques feminism as incorrect in its inherent assumption that women and men are sets or groups of individuals with clear gender attributes. Following Simone de Beauvoir, Butler (1990; cf. de Beauvoir 1954) argues that biological sexual differences do not determine gender characteristics or indicate a desire for the opposite sex. Butler (1990:25) also argues that 'bodies matter' but that sexual desire and gender are viewed by her as interchangeable variables that may change in different situations. Butler then posits that gender is 'performative', that is, it is assumed and assigned to by individuals, but as a performance, and it is not inescapably culturally determined, or inextricably essential or fixed. Most significantly, Butler argues that when the binary male/female genders are dominantly performed, they relegate other performances, such as queer, to the periphery.

This relational configuration of power must be challenged politically and 'destabilized' by the bisexual, transgender, lesbian and gay groups that it ostracises and stigmatises (Butler 1990:25). Queer theory therefore differentiates itself from feminism and other established, traditional gay and lesbian approaches in that rather than being an all-encompassing term for non-straight approaches, it suggests that sexual and gender orientations should emphasise their constant in-flux potential, or subscribe to what Butler (1990; cf. Aaron 2006; Tasker 2006) terms 'bending' or 'queering' of gender and sexual orientations. Butler's queer theory notions of performance and performativity coalesce with the different strategies used by non-straight spectators to derive voyeuristic pleasure from films. These differently

gendered spectators dismantle the film's narrative. In this article I extend Butler's argument and apply it to Lagerfeld's photographic images: his differently gendered spectators dismantle and destabilise the narrative in his *mise-en-scène*, creating new/unforeseen meaning in what is otherwise a traditionally heterosexual publication.

Mythology

This section focuses on the analysis of Lagerfeld's mythological characters. Firstly, I analyse two portrayals that support the 'male gaze'. As the *Calendar* was made for a male audience, this is to be expected. Secondly, I argue that with the inclusion of male subjects, Mulvey's notion of the 'desiring heterosexual male gaze' is challenged, allowing female spectators to occupy the historically privileged scopophilic position. This is achieved through the inclusion of male models who avert the male gaze allowing sexual and voyeuristic pleasure to be had by female spectators. Lastly, I argue that the male gaze is repudiated or subverted by women posing as male deities. This denies both the male and the female gaze; suggesting neither or both, but only after a contemplative look to discern the sex of the deity in question. It is also with these two latter themes that Mulvey's 'male gaze' is problematised. Appropriating the criticism of Mulvey as part of my main analysis, the possibility of Lagerfeld's images provoking different types of sexualised gazes is therefore also explored, with the inclusion of male models having the potential to prompt the gay or bisexual gaze, and how images of women posing within heterosexual conventions and women posing as male deities possibly provoke the lesbian gaze. Finally it is argued that the inclusion of these different bodies in the stylistic convention of the 'girly calendar' can be read as strategies that subvert the patriarchal, heter-

onormative *status quo* of the male gaze. In all instances, however, the various overtly sexualised body parts of the deities, such as the presence of the gold phallus and gold-flamed pudenda, provide highly sexualised images to gaze upon.

The 'male gaze'

Given that these images are expected within the parameters of the 'girly calendar', this article only discusses two examples¹² that support Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, beginning with **Aurora** (Figure 1), Roman goddess of Dawn. Her brother is Sol, the sun, and her sister is Luna, the moon. According to myth, Aurora renewed herself every morning and heralded the arrival of the sun. To this end, Lagerfeld has illuminated her upper body as though she were bathing in sunlight; her long blond hair also catches the light, making it translucent, but her most apparent feature is her gold flamed pudenda. Her genitalia are covered in a sun-like adornment, with gold streaks emanating from her centre, implying that Aurora's femininity is the epicentre of a flamefuelled desire; the gold is like that of molten, golden lava, spewing outwards. Her adornment, while 'shielding' her 'modesty', only serves to heighten or objectify her sexuality further. She is an ideal image of the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' that Mulvey (2000:487) identifies.

Bacchantes (or Bacchae) (Figure 2),¹³ famed for their orgiastic rites and religious ecstasies, are the followers of Bacchus, the god of the grape harvest. Bacchus is discussed further on in this article, but he is possibly one of the most well-known, or infamous gods of antiquity. His followers are commonly shown taking part in revelries and dissipation, but here, Lagerfeld represents a Bacchante as a highly eroticised female form, with her 'S' shape and arms held over her head,



Figure 1: Aurora.



Figure 2: Bacchantes (or Bacchae).



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Figure 3: Apollo.

the focus is clearly on her full breasts and pudenda. The 'S' shape also serves to highlight her slender waist and the soft curve of her stomach. There is no need to second guess her gender or her sex. Her arms above her head suggest wantonness, while her dark curls reach down and tantalisingly tease her erect nipples. Her sexuality is laid bare and there is no shyness or vulnerability in her posture. Her hair is filled with (gold) grapes and vine leaves: a testament to her love of her god, Bacchus, and by extension her love of wine, drink and revelry. She is thus a sexualized 'girly calendar' trope, a perfect example of the 'male gaze'.

Challenging the 'male gaze'

I have selected three examples from the *Calendar* that challenge the characterisation of the male gaze: Apollo, Bacchus, and Narcissus. As Mulvey has emphasised, male spectators do not like to gaze upon their 'exhibitionist like', yet here they are confronted precisely with that. Lagerfeld's incorporation of semi-nude males, as well as the highly eroticised male form, challenges Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. When a 'girly calendar', or erotic magazine, is produced for its male audience, that audience does not expect to be confronted with male models, or even worse, semi-nude male models. Predictably, though, Lagerfeld has selected an extremely beautiful man/boy to portray **Apollo** (Figures 3, 4), who is the patron god of the arts. He is considered to be perfection personified and is identified by his attributes: bow and arrows, lyre, and crowning laurel wreath which frames his exquisite face perfectly, and his gold codpiece, fashioned in the likeness of male statues from the Victorian era, which serves to accentuate his maleness. Even though the photograph is in black and white, the viewer's eye cannot but be drawn to the smooth, metallic codpiece, which is situated directly in the centre of the frame,



Figure 4: Apollo.

as if the rest of his body as well as the black background are only included as a casing and mounting for his perfectly moulded gold genitalia. This type of image is not normally found in a calendar catering to a heterosexual male viewership, and through their inclusion the male spectator's fascination is turned against him, thus presenting an obvious challenge to the 'male gaze'. This image also emphasises the limits of Mulvey's 'male gaze', as her concept always assumes that all spectators are heterosexual. This photograph challenges that assumption, presenting a male model who is an object of gay desire.

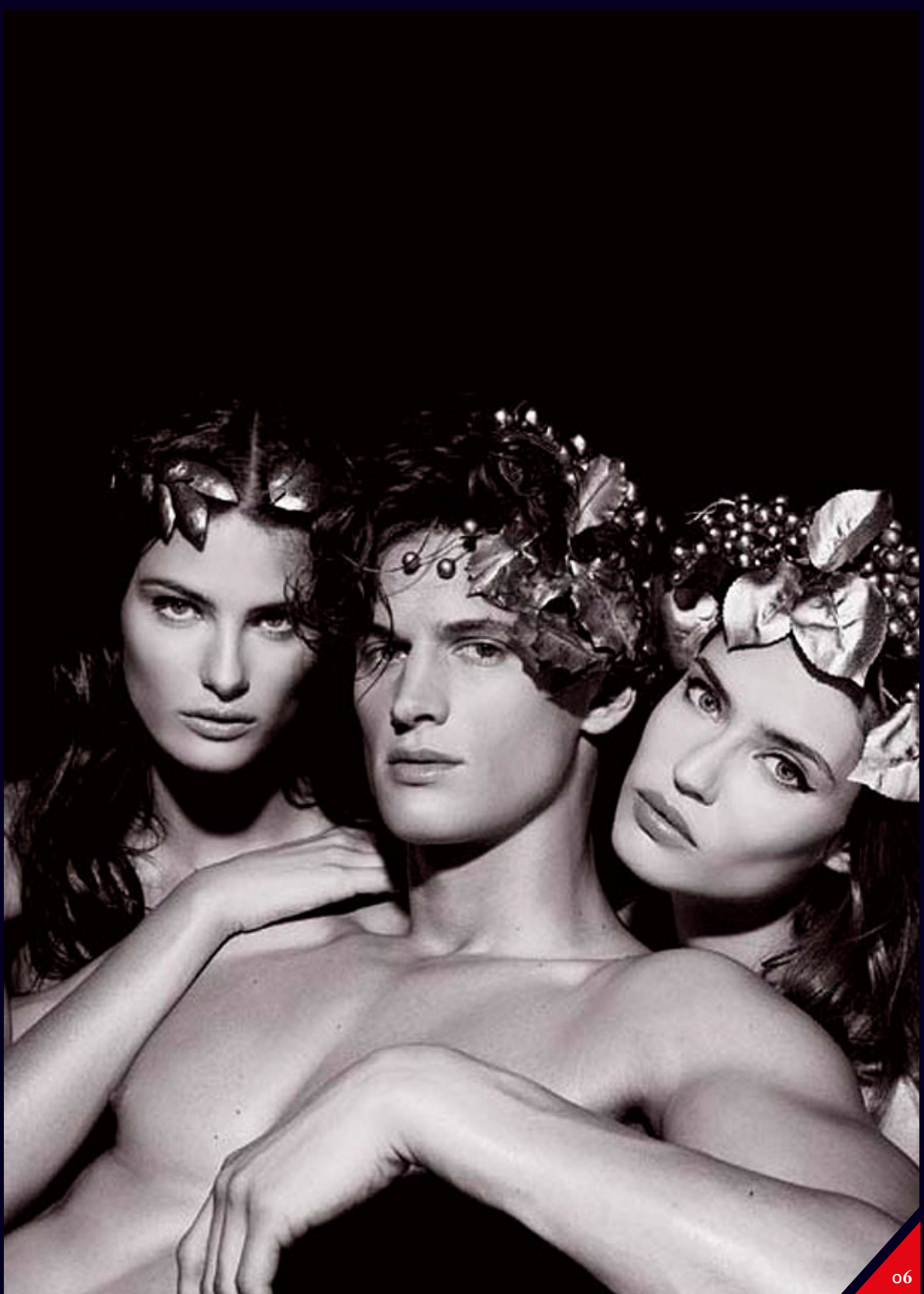
The second example is that of **Bacchus** and his Bacchantes (Figures 5, 6), his most ardent followers. Bacchus, the god of the grape harvest, with the iconic symbols of ivy, vines and grapes, is also associated with ecstasy and debauchery. Here we find a beautiful male model representing Bacchus, flanked by two of his adoring Bacchantes. All three are crowned with



gold vine leaves and grapes, while he is clearly the centre of their adulation. The full length shot incorporates the frontal pose of one of the Bacchantes, who is clearly an example of a highly eroticised female form. However, the long shot of Bacchus framed by two of his Bacchantes is also decidedly eroticised but in a somewhat unconventional formation. The ‘threesome’ obviously hints at orgiastic pleasures and delights, but the eroticisation that is most prominent is that of the *male* form: a prominent gold codpiece that serves to ‘protect’ Bacchus’ ‘modesty’. In a distinct form of erotic reversal, his gold codpiece takes centre stage, surrounded as it is with gold leaves and ‘edible’ fruits, with its highly sexualised ‘oral’ association. The codpiece’s ripe, plump grapes hint not only of the intoxication of wine, but sexual intoxication, featuring the phallus as an object to be ‘devoured’ and adored. The nipples of both the Bacchantes’ breasts have been painted with nude make-up, de-eroticising them, which serves to highlight their

resemblance to smooth marble of Grecian statuary, but detracts somewhat from the allure of their breasts — which in turn de-emphasises them, giving the male audience nothing obvious to gaze upon. Instead they collectively frame Bacchus, serving more as mere embellishments than the *foci* of the camera shot. In Figure 6, Bacchus is the focus of a photograph that consists of him with his Bacchantes, a medium close-up that has his bare chest, defined biceps and handsome face as the centrepiece, with his Bacchantes positioned as mere props or ornaments. The vine leaves, ivy and grapes woven into their very un-coiffed, or post-coital hair conjure up images of wild, wanton, adulterated and animalistic desires. Here Bacchus is the object of the erotic gaze, and as Mulvey (2000:488) argues, the ‘male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification’; he is the object of fantasy and the intended male audience is sure to find him a threat. While this argument follows if one agrees with Mulvey’s assertion that all spectators are part of a heteronormative *status quo*, it becomes problematic if the spectator is homosexual and derives pleasure from gazing upon Bacchus.

The third example is that of **Echo and Narcissus** (Figure 7). Echo was a mountain nymph who was cursed by the wife of Zeus, Hera, because Echo had lied to her about Zeus’ philandering. Her curse was to make Echo only capable of repeating what others said. Narcissus is the son of a nymph and a river god. He disdained any who loved him, but fell in love with himself when enticed to gaze upon his reflection in a pool of water. Fixated on his own reflected beauty, he was unable to leave his image and he died there. Echo fell desperately in love with Narcissus who obviously loved only himself, and her distress made her wither away. Lagerfeld’s Echo exhibits a luscious licentiousness, with her raised arms pressing her breasts unabashedly outwards, while her long untamed hair



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Figure 6: Bacchus.



Figure 7: Echo and Narcissus.

intimates at a wild sexuality. Despite her overt sexuality, spectators' eyes are not drawn to her. It is rather the beautiful, muscular Narcissus and his immense gold penile piece and pose that dominate the photograph. He lies looking into his mirror image, his one leg is raised and bent slightly backwards, forcing his legs open lasciviously, thereby presenting the penile codpiece to the viewer. Given that codpieces were traditionally used to accentuate the size and form of male genitalia (Ashelford 1996:17), Lagerfeld's gold codpiece can be said to be quite successful in this regard, as it exaggerates the model's endowment, while his open legs further expose his gold decorative member. This is clearly an instance of a challenge to the 'male gaze', as Echo is literally little more than ornamentation to the real luminary of the photograph, a mere echo of *his* beauty. This example also intimates at homo-erotica: *like* sexually desiring *like*, which is a continuation of the problematisation begun above.

Repudiation of the 'male gaze'

I now focus on the examples from the *Calendar* that I postulate disavow the definition of the male gaze. The first is the warrior prince **Ajax** (Figure 8), who is generally described as enormous, extremely strong and muscular. While his armour and weapons are not necessarily part of his iconography, as a warrior prince these symbols are always present in some form. He was considered to be one of the greatest ancient Greek warriors in the Trojan War, second only to Achilles, whose body he carried back to the Greek camp after his death. Lagerfeld's Ajax, while clearly depicted as a warrior, complete with armour and helmet, is modelled by a woman, contrasting with the muscular soldier of antiquity. The black leather armour is created to hint at a heavy bullet proof vest, hung around her neck, but the breastplate consists of two black leather nipple covers. Instead of protecting her chest, this 'breastplate' accentuates the model's sex, and fetishises her breasts.

It is interesting to speculate as to how Lagerfeld's re-sexing of Ajax might have been received by the audience: it is altogether acceptable and, yes even 'normal' for a heterosexual man to gaze upon a semi-naked woman and desire her. But what of the outcome once the Ajax of Lagerfeld's imagination is 'outed' as the male warrior prince? Mulvey (2000:489-490) argues that the meaning of woman is sexual difference, or rather, her lack of a penis. This absence underscores the castration threat that the male unconscious strives to overcome by fetishising women. Lagerfeld's images, however, do not allow for this as Ajax has been 'castrated', and can only be viewed as a threat and a reminder of the original trauma of castration, thereby repudiating the fetishising objective of the 'male gaze'. This re-sexing of Ajax can also be interpreted as an example of Butler's (1990) 'queering' or



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Figure 8: Ajax.



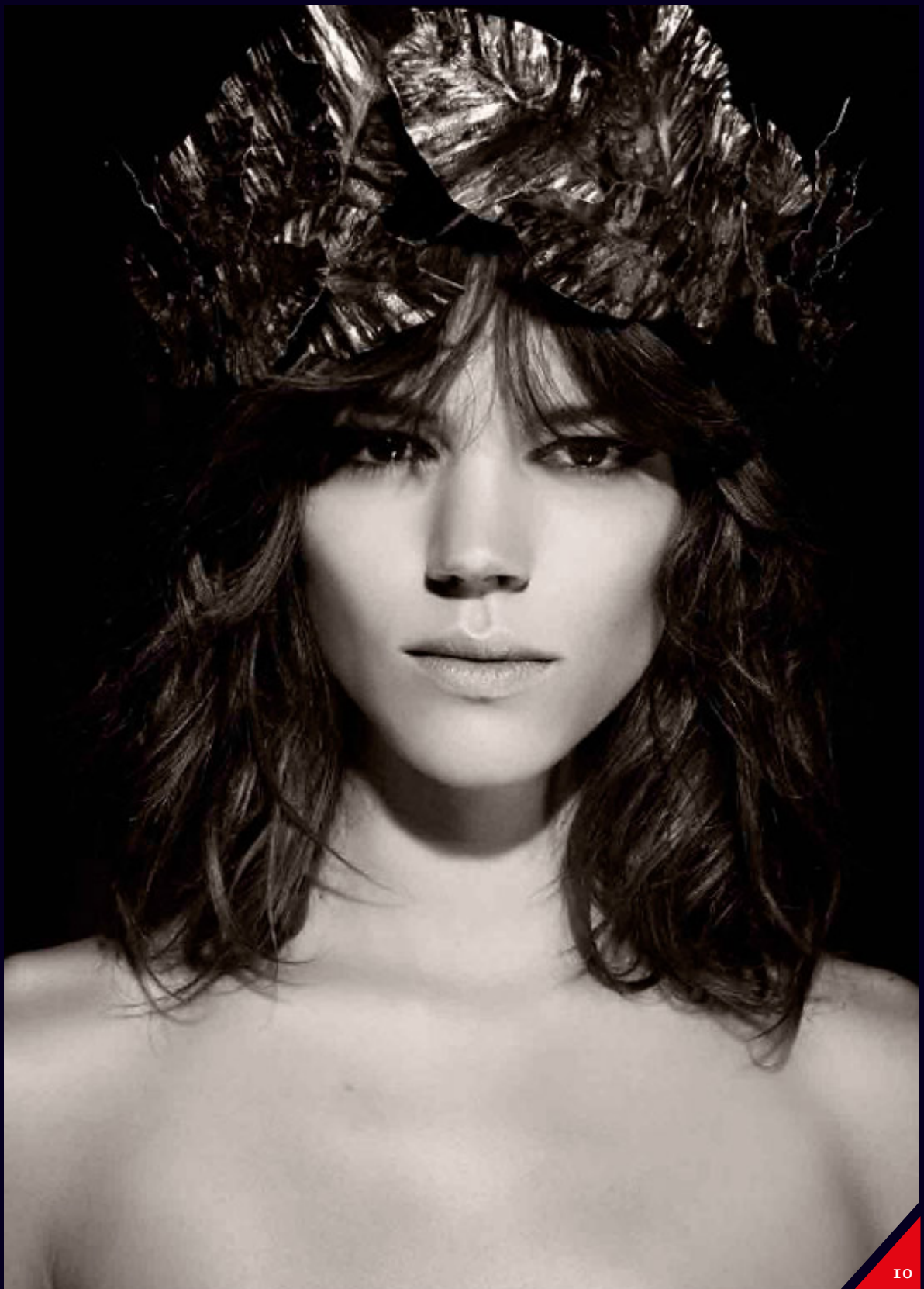
Figure 9: Apollo.

‘bending’; it most certainly can be interpreted as gender as performed, multiple, a political statement to confuse binary oppositions, or essentialism, upon which Mulvey’s theory is based.

Apollo (Figures 9, 10), the god of the arts, already represented by Lagerfeld, is re-represented here by a woman masquerading as a man. Wearing the same gold phallic codpiece and iconic laurel as Lagerfeld’s previous articulation, this Apollo is definitely a woman — feminine, slim hiped, extremely delicate, and undeniably beautiful — artistically portrayed rather than obviously fetishised. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of her breasts and the attention grabbing codpiece is rather unexpected and a somewhat discombobulating image to be found in a ‘girly calendar’, or anywhere else for that matter. Apollo is neither male nor female, but rather male *and* female. Is the spectator able to transcend this double sexing of the god of the arts? In addition, owing to the

rather petite physique of the model, it does require a more careful viewing in order to discern the god’s sex. The close-up of Apollo’s face (Figure 10), taken from just below the collar bone upwards, is a more difficult depiction to ascertain: there is nothing to identify the god as female and taken in context, or rather, without context, this Apollo could very well be simply an effeminate version of the male god of arts. This female/male Apollo conceals the castration fear by having a gold phallus attached, a concealment that is in my opinion an example of an image that ‘freezes the look, fixates the spectator’ (Mulvey 2000:493-494). For Mulvey (2000:483), a woman is the ‘bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it’, unlike men who have the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism of the female form to overcome the danger of castration. Lagerfeld’s female Apollo has transcended castration as she possesses a penis. It is particularly interesting that Lagerfeld has also chosen a distorted version of this photograph as the cover image for the *Calendar* (Figure 11), as it represents the most extreme repudiation of the ‘male gaze’ by presenting an example of both penis and ‘bleeding wound’.

Another example of what I argue to be the repudiation of the male gaze is that of **Eurydice and Orpheus** (Figures 12, 13). Eurydice was the beautiful nymph-wife of Orpheus, a musician and prophet. They adored one another, and are often depicted in an embrace. Tragically though, Eurydice, after being fatally bitten by a snake, descended into Hades. Orpheus followed her and begged the god of death to release her. He agreed to do so, on one condition: that Orpheus should not ever look back upon his beloved as she ascended with him. But he could not resist turning around, and so saw his screaming wife being pulled back into the underworld. Cleverly, Lagerfeld positions Eurydice behind Orpheus, so that he does not set



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Figure 10: Apollo.

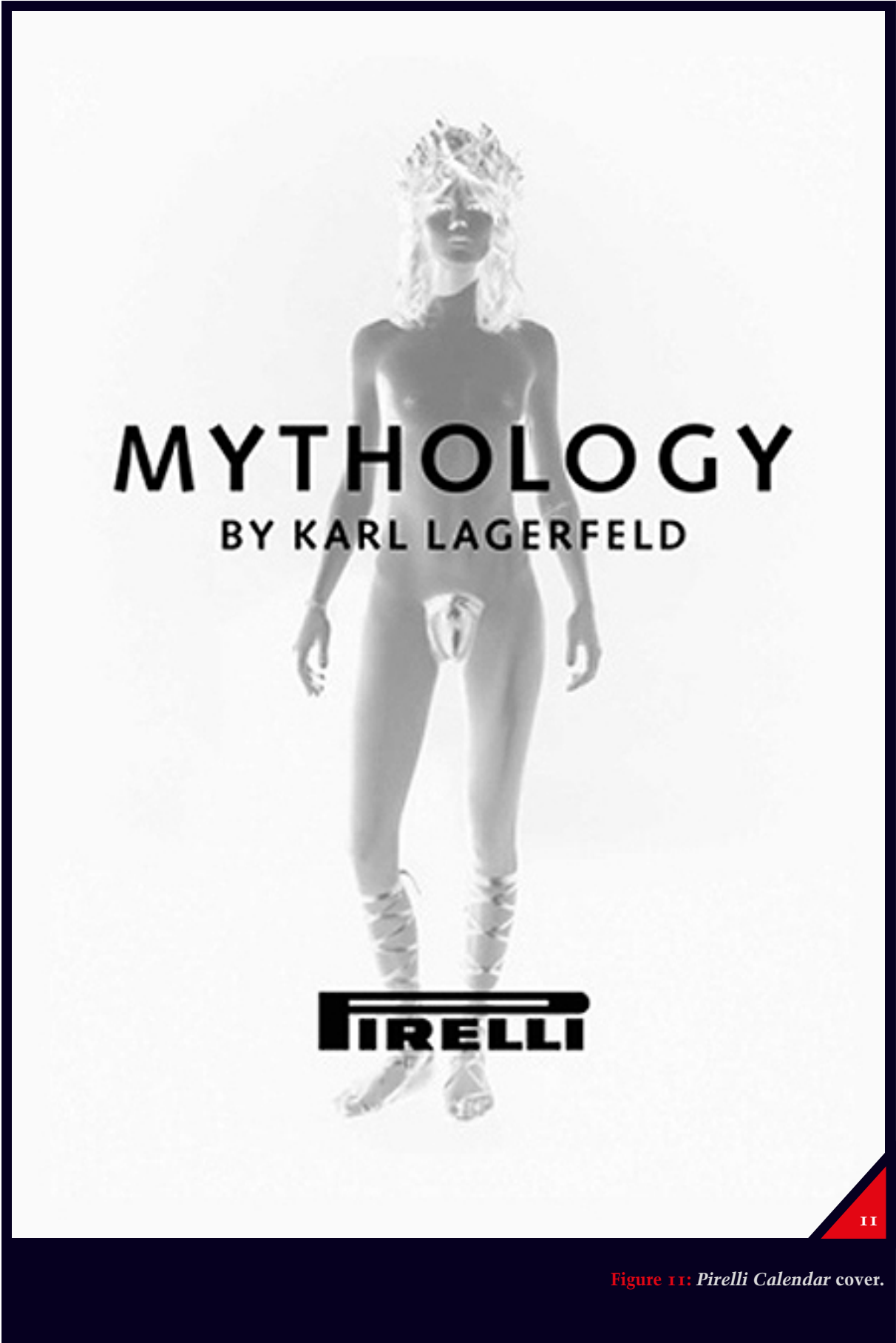


Figure 11: Pirelli Calendar cover.



Figure 12: Eurydice and Orpheus



Figure 13: Eurydice and Orpheus

eyes upon her. However, Lagerfeld's Eurydice and Orpheus are depicted as a lesbian couple, although they are arguably extremely androgynous. However, even though both models are relatively flat-chested, two naked beautiful women in an embrace must surely be the ultimate erotic fantasy for most male viewers. It is also highly exhibitionistic and the extreme form of voyeurism: watching two beautiful women engaging in Sapphic pleasures. At a superficial glance, these two women are an ideal voyeuristic fantasy for the male spectator. However, when one learns that Orpheus is represented by a woman, the real fear of castration is apparent. It is what Mulvey (2000:492) refers to as 'disorientating; the spectator's fascination is turned against him'. The psychoanalytic argument that women represent symbolic castration, is a very real threat in this instance with a woman representing Orpheus. It is doubly confusing should no role be ascribed to the female model, because her full-frontal nudity is ideal for the 'male gaze' to enjoy. However,

once she is ascribed her role and name, that of the male mythological figure Orpheus, the fetishistic and voyeuristic mechanisms used to circumvent the threat of castration are null and void. In an instant, the image comes to repudiate the 'male gaze' as the camera's look is disavowed, the photographic illusion broken, and the real threat of castration becomes obvious.

These images can, however, also be read as a criticism of Mulvey: her theory does not consider lesbian spectators whose voyeuristic pleasures are derived from looking at women as objects of sexual desire. Both Eurydice and Orpheus, as transgendered, are styled in such a way that intimates that they are less intended as surrogates for heterosexual male spectators, and rather are themselves objects of lesbian desire.

The last example that I refer to in support of my argument is that of the god of the underworld, Hades (Figure 14). This dark god of the dead, who ruled in the



Figure 14: Hades.

underworld, is usually depicted as regal and kinglike, not the wrathful and hated devil of Christianity, but a god who ruled over death with fairness and majestic dignity. Lagerfeld's Hades, however, while still majestic and stately, is represented by a black female model adorned in almost luminous gold body paint, which covers her nipples entirely. This serves to fetishise her breasts, to which one's gaze is immediately directed. The body paint appears as a drawing of a skeleton, which might be a reference to the dead she rules over, while her ebony black skin is obviously a reference to Hades being the so-called dark god of the dead.¹⁴ In a very clever touch, Lagerfeld has her standing on various parts of discarded armour, a shield and even a helmet, a majestic goddess presiding over the remains of the dead. Hades has been re-articulated: while still imperious, he is now portrayed in a highly eroticised female form. The spectator is absorbed into a voyeuristic image that becomes perverted and the gaze, uneasy: Hades has in fact been castrated. The fetishistic

scophophilia predicated upon her full-frontal nudity is inverted and becomes a threat when her castration is made apparent, while the reassuring pleasure that the 'male gaze' initially derives from her form becomes a psychological danger through its outright rejection.

Positioned outside of Mulvey's framework, this feminine Hades can also be seen as an example of Mary Anne Doane's (cf. 1982) 'masquerade', where Hades' femininity is constructed as a mask to conceal sexual identity. Hades' representation also conforms to queer theory, which argues that all sexual and gender identities are hybrid and are always in a potential or fluid state (cf. Aaron 2006; Tasker 2006). Hades is another example of gender 'bending' or 'queering' (cf. Butler 1990).

With these last two themes, Lagerfeld has also offered up a critique of Mulvey's assumptions of the heterosexual male spectator. He represents deities that illustrate gender as one of performance: as a shifting, fluid, diverse and split identity, rather than as essence and binary opposites (cf. Aaron; 2006; Butler 1990; Doane 1982; Studlar 1985; Tasker 2006). He has 'bent' or 'queered' these gods, thereby providing voyeuristic pleasures to non-straight viewers (cf. Butler 1990), thus turning Mulvey's 'male gaze' on its head, and presenting different positionalities and multiple sexualities.

Conclusion

Mythology follows and reproduces many of the standard tropes of the historical female nude, traditionally found in erotic magazines and the pinup/girly calendar, all of which position women as the subject of the objectifying male gaze. The association between the stylistic conventions of the girly calendar that Lagerfeld's photographic image obviously draws

upon and Mulvey's theoretical framework is therefore not unexpected. In this sense it does not offer any new insights or commentary. Indeed, Mulvey's theory of the 'male gaze' seems a predictable and obvious lens through which to read the images. This is particularly apparent as Lagerfeld does present his female models in conventional ways that situate them as sexualised according to heterosexual norms.

However, Lagerfeld has challenged and subverted the gaze in four distinct ways. Firstly, by re-articulating these classical representations and aesthetically re-gendering and re-sexing the gods and goddesses, he has defied our stereotypical perceptions of classical *mythoi*. Secondly, by breaking with the expectation of the *Pirelli Calendar* as a mere 'girly calendar' through the introduction of extensive male nudity, he has flouted its very ethos. Thirdly, he has broken with tradition through the incorporation of full frontal nudity and the addition of cleverly conceptualised thematic and detailed latent meaning. Ironically, while clearly elevating the artistic aspirations of this calendar through creating a work that not only demands an in-depth hermeneutic analysis, as with all art, he has also introduced full frontal female nudity that very distinctly borrows from contemporary pornography with the inclusion of hairless pudenda, a favourite aesthetic of the adult film industry. And yet this also serves to maintain an aesthetic that is derived from Classical and Victorian sculpture.

The main theme of this article is that of the visual pleasure derived from looking at the *Pirelli Calendar*, and in keeping with that theme of looking repeatedly as one does at images of great beauty or artistry, I conclude that Lagerfeld has added yet another conceptual layer to that of 'looking'. Not only does he expect spectators to repeatedly look at these most desirable images, he ingeniously knows that spectators

will have to look repeatedly as their perceptions of classical mythological representations are challenged. He has presented the presumably male spectator of the *Pirelli* 'girly calendar' with his own exhibitionist like, as well as with the castrated deities of Hades, Hermes and Ajax. There is also the 'castrated' Apollo, re-sexing a male god with a female model complete with a golden phallus strap-on. Lagerfeld's creative and artistic endeavour has re-invented, re-gendered (or transgendered) and re-articulated several of the Greco-Roman deities and mythological figures. In sum, he has destabilised the gaze through challenging the heteronormative ideologies and patriarchal *status quo*.

In subverting and challenging the gaze, Lagerfeld does not only disavow or transgress the look, his *Calendar* also highlights the limitations of Mulvey's framework and her heteronormative assumptions. He challenges politically configured binary opposites and dismantles them; he destabilises the images, presenting a *Calendar* of subverted gazes: transgender, bisexual, gay and lesbian.

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The cast of those who appear in this article (alphabetical order):

Balti, Bianca: *as a Bacchante: a follower of Bacchus*
Beha Erichsen, Freja: *Apollo: god of the arts, and Orpheus: musician and prophet*
Davis, Jake: *Achilles: half divine hero*
Fontana, Isabeli: *a Bacchante: a follower of Bacchus*

Giabiconi, Baptiste: *Narcissus: a beautiful youth obsessed by his own image*, and *Apollo: god of the arts*

Kershaw, Abbey Lee: *Echo: a wood nymph who was desperately in love with Narcissus*, and *Eurydice: nymph wife of Orpheus*

Mount, Heidi: *Aurora: goddess of the dawn*

Neff, Garret: *Bacchus: the god of the grape harvest*

Wasson, Erin: *Ajax: warrior prince*, and as a *Bacchante: a follower of Bacchus*

Williams, Jeneil: *Hades: god of the underworld*.

6 Pirelli Calendar. 2002. *The 2003 Pirelli Calendar*. [O]. Available: <http://www.pirelli.com/corporate/en/press/2002/11/04/the-2003-pirelli-calendar/> Accessed 25 December 2012.

7 Pearls of the orient. 2007. *Pirelli*. [O]. Available: <http://www.pirelli.com/tyre/gb/en/news/2007/11/29/pearls-of-the-orient/> Accessed 27 October 2012.

8 Circa 1998: Hargreaves, S. 2005. *Pinups for the auto elite. Highly desired but hard to get, the sexy 2005 Pirelli calendar is unveiled — so to speak*. [O]. Available: http://money.cnn.com/2005/02/08/pf/autos/pirelli_calendar/ Accessed 27 October 2012.

9 Ommer, U. 1984. *Pirelli Calendar*. [O]. Available: <http://www.google.co.za/search?q=uwe+Ommer+%2B+Pirelli&hl=en&tbo=u&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ei=gNnYULmPEeXa0QWKw4HABQ&sqi=2&ved=0CDMQsAQ&biw=1093&bih=502> Accessed 03 June 2012.

10 All images of Lagerfeld's 2011 *Pirelli Calendar: Mythology* are taken from the following website, although they do appear on numerous different web sites: *Pirelli Calendar* by Karl Lagerfeld. 2010. ROCKMYBLOG. [O]. Available: <http://www.rockmyblog.com/pirelli-2011-calendar-karl-lagerfeld-36-photos/> Accessed 03 June 2012.

11 For example, Mulvey's article has been criticised for its lack of rigour and objectivity; her overly descriptive style; her presumed audience responses;

Notes

1 This article uses Mulvey's (2000) re-printed version in: *Film and theory. An anthology*, edited by R Stam and T Miller.

2 All of the *Mythology* images are freely available on the internet.

3 All historical information regarding the *Pirelli* calendar has been taken from the official website: <http://www.pirelli.com> Accessed 28 February 2011.

4 Bertram, C. 2008. A look at Pirelli's calendar girls. *NY Daily News*. [O]. Available: <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/music-arts/pirelli-calendar-girls-article-1.290208> Accessed 03 June 2012.

5 Leibovitz, A. 2000. Women's Studies. *The New Yorker*. [O]. Available: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2000/01/24/2000_01_24_062_TNY_LIBRY_000020061 Accessed 03 June 2012.

and an over-reliance on psychoanalytic and structuralist terms (Kauffman 1998:72; Laughey 2007:105; Merck 2007:11; Nicholls 2000:47). Some of these criticisms fall outside the purview of this article, while others, such as those positioned by Mary Anne Doane and Judith Butler, have been incorporated into the text to problematise Mulvey's theory.

12 While this article only focuses on two examples in support of Mulvey's 'male gaze', in actuality, two-thirds of Lagerfeld's photographic images fall within this theme, which is to be expected, as the *Calendar* has been made for a male spectatorship.

13 All details of mythical characters have been taken from Buxton (2004) and: Greek gods and goddesses [sic]. 2011. [O]. Available: <http://www.greek-gods-and-goddesses.com/> Accessed 28 February 2011
And: Greek mythology. 2011. [O]. <http://www.greekmythology.com/> Accessed 28 February 2011.

14 She is the only black model in the calendar, which leads one to assume that she was specifically selected because of the colour of her skin: Hades being the 'dark' lord of the underworld.

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