

## **To be a gentlewoman: shifts in the representation of women of fashion**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

Over the past decade, representations of women in fashion have gained in naturalness and “authenticity”. Old concepts of “prettiness” and conventional attractiveness are being invalidated. Fashion that plays to the female gaze is the latest form of status-seeking. In order to understand these shifts, this paper unpacks representational strategies of the influential niche title *The Gentlewoman* that constructs the image of the modern, independent, honest, interesting, hard-working and stylish woman. The magazine advertises itself as the place “where real women, real events and real things are enjoyed” [1]. The idea is that we are tired of “fake” fashion and trivialised representations of women; we are looking for something “real”.

But as Simone de Beauvoir has articulated, once a woman is “dressed”, she is “the character she represents, but is not” (Beauvoir 1997: 547). What approaches are used to represent a woman in fashion media without “emptying” her specificity? How many manipulations can be made to still represent a woman as “authentic” without reducing her to the “image”? This paper scrutinises the concept of the “gentlewoman”.

#### **Methodology**

The theoretical ground for the research is a social semiotic theory of representation. The paper explores both written and visual excerpts and employs techniques of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (drawing on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen). The paper analyses how particular semiotic choices signify “authentic” women and their values.

#### **Findings**

The magazine *The Gentlewoman* uses a conversational, professional, yet playful tone and emotionally resonant photography to encourage the reader to feel sympathy and warmth towards the “gentlewoman”. As the paper claims, the idea of “sincere simulations” has gained significance in contemporary fashion discourse.

#### **Value**

As a result, the list of characteristics of representations of the “real” woman of fashion is introduced.

**Keywords**

fashion discourse; representation of fashion; the gentlewoman; authenticity

**Article Classification**

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## The “gentlewoman” as a fashion identity

In recent years the “gentlewoman” has become one of the popular “feminine identities” in fashion discourse. The image refers to an intellectual professional woman who does not want to look “pretty”, but values her appearance, who loves clothes, but rejects fashion trends. She is passionate about what she is doing and she shares her personality through her wardrobe choices.

Dictionaries define the “gentlewoman” as “a woman who belongs to a high social class, or who is kind, polite, and honest” [2], and also as “a woman above the vulgar” [3]. Fashion blogger and author of the “self-help book” *The New Garconne: How to Be a Modern Gentlewoman* (2016) Navaz Batliwalla formulates, “it is all about being true to yourself, treating people with kindness and respect and appreciating the good things in life” (Batliwalla, 2016b). At the same time, Batliwalla admits, the “gentlewoman” concept is quite hard to explain to people who are not in our world” (ibid). The “gentlewoman” is a noble type of feminine fashion identity. To be a “gentlewoman”, taste, intelligence, and professional expertise are required.

Today's concept of the “gentlewoman” has gained its influence and meaning not least because of the namesake niche bi-annual magazine. Launched in 2010 with Phoebe Philo on the first cover, *The Gentlewoman* constructs the image of the modern, independent, honest, interesting, hard-working and stylish woman. *The Gentlewoman*'s editor-in-chief Penny Martin is a former academic, with a serious attitude to clothes and strong opinions (Martin 2014). *The Business of Fashion* describes *The Gentlewoman* as “one of the industry's most intellectual and informed women's magazines” and Martin as “a respected fashion editor and academic noted within the industry for her cerebral and considered point of view” (BoF 500 Penny Martin, n.d.).

The bi-annual publication has released eighteen issues to date and has a worldwide circulation of almost 100 000 copies. As Martin comments, the magazine does not have a circulation of a mass magazine, but makes a difference in the representations of women in fashion (Martin 2014). Having older women as cover characters, *The Gentlewoman* visibly goes against conventional representations (young, thin, tall and white). The magazine represents professional women (“women doing stuff” (ibid.)): old concepts of “pretty”, passive, sexy, conventionally attractive women are being invalidated (or associated with “lower” fashion culture).

These shifts in the representations of women in fashion should be considered as part of the broader debate. Representations and values that have dominated the fashion system since the mid-twentieth century (the ideal of the female body's thinness and youth, the privilege of Caucasian ethnic groups, and the significance of the constant chase for the latest trends and styles) in recent years have been challenged by empirical phenomena (Mora, Rocamora and Volonté 2016: 177). Emanuela Mora and Marco Pedroni in *Fashion Tales: Feeding the Imagery* argue that “we are witnessing a turn in this imagery as issues related to social, environmental and cultural sustainability come to predominate in many areas of human activity” (Mora and Pedroni, 2017). As this paper underlines, the “gentlewoman” is not just a popular “fashion category” for a certain “niche” market,

but the signifier of important shifts in the representations of fashion and women in fashion.

### **“Real woman”?**

The magazine *The Gentlewoman* advertises itself as “focused on personal style – the way women actually look, think and dress” [1]. The idea is clear: we are tired of “fake” fashion and trivialised representations of women; we are looking for something “real” and “authentic”.

“Authenticity” is a buzzword in contemporary fashion discourse. We have heard that fashion is dead (Edelkoort, 2015), consumers do not need more and more “stuff” and demand “real clothing” – something valuable and emotional (The State of Fashion 2017). There is an emerging cultural trend to celebrate the “slow lifestyle” in post-growth society, and there is the need for “authenticity” in our time of post-truth. “Fashion” (understood as rapid changing of styles) is becoming no longer “fashionable”. Practices of cultural production of “real fashion” – transformation of “fashion” back to “clothing” – are developing.

Do we believe in this “real fashion”? In the last issue of *Vestoj* magazine titled *On authenticity* Andrew Potter reminds us, that “effective conspicuous consumption must always manifest itself as something nobler” (Potter, 2017: 140), and argues, that our current obsession with experience of authenticity is really just another form of status-seeking (ibid.). Connotations of intellectual elitism in the “gentlewoman” concept are in evidence, it is “high” fashion culture mediated by prestigious niche magazine. The magazine is also known for its Club, a community of “sophisticated women and men who demand quality and originality from their agenda of cultural happenings” [4]. Events include life drawing classes, film screenings, or archive excursions. The Gentlewoman Club is advertised as “a place where real women, real events and real things are enjoyed” (ibid).

The term “real woman” raises many questions. As Simone de Beauvoir has articulated, once a woman is “dressed”, she is “the character she represents, but is not” (Beauvoir 1997: 547). The characters featured in *The Gentlewoman* (among them are scientists, artists, writers, and politicians) are aware of that. As Martin points out in the interview, it is not easy to persuade the “gentlewoman” to be featured in the magazine (Martin, 2014). These women are concerned how they are going to be represented, they do not want to be associated with “fashion” (with “fashion” understood as “fake”, frivolous, idealised, and trivialised images), they are afraid of looking “stylised”, wearing make-up and borrowed clothes from the latest fashion collections. They are worried about looking “foolish” and not themselves.

What approaches are used to represent a woman in fashion media without “emptying” her specificity? How many manipulations can be made to still represent a woman as “authentic” without reducing her to the “image”?

## **Methodology: Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the “gentlewoman” concept**

“Fashion” is manufactured by the process of representations, “translations”, “naming” garments and species (Barthes 1983). Discursive construction of species of fashionable women has been discussed by fashion studies scholars (Rocomora 2009, Tutton 2015, Laing 2014). Unpacking the construction of the very popular feminine identity “la Parisienne”, Agnes Rocomora reveals illusion of identity, without which the objects and styles would be devoid of value. “Fashion identities have been created in order to multiply the opportunities and niche markets for fashion driven products”, observes Rocomora (Rocomora 2009: 125).

The “gentlewoman” is a fashion category that refers to a certain niche market with certain values. At the same time, as this paper argues, it stands for a shift in the representation of women in fashion. In this paper I will try to unpack the cultural construction of the “real woman” in the fashion magazine by studying representational strategies of the magazine *The Gentlewoman*. This work is not merely the analysis of one specific fashion magazine, but the reflection of extremely relevant changes in the representations of women in current fashion discourse. Women's lifestyle magazines “contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point of time” (Ferguson 1983: 1).

“Authenticity” is a very tricky term, which is hard to define. I would not even try to grasp “the real real”. I approach the subject with the assumptions that reality is socially constructed and analyse merely representations of the “real”. The theoretical ground for my research is a social semiotic theory of representation (Kress 2010). I am interested in the way the magazine *The Gentlewoman* constitutes “the real woman”.

In this paper I will work with the six latest issues of the magazine (from № 13 to 18) that I have in my home library and also with the section *Library* available on the magazine’s website which contains “90 extensive profiles of women of great renown and distinction, as featured in issues № 1 to 18” [1]. For close reading I have chosen the latest to date issue of the magazine – № 18 Autumn & Winter 2018 with the 90-year-old French filmmaker Agnès Varda on the cover.

I will explore both written and visual excerpts through employing techniques of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (drawing on the work of Kress (2010) and van Leeuwen (2006)). My task is to analyse how particular semiotic choices signify “authentic” women and their values and to introduce the list of characteristics of the representations of “real” woman of fashion.

My approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in no way “denaturalising”, unmasking, criticising or negative. The idea is to reveal the social construction of the concept and to reflect related values. Being myself a loyal reader of *The Gentlewoman* and having a lot of respect for its editorial team, I should admit that in this paper I attempt to carry out Critical Discourse Analysis to the publication which is in accord with my own viewpoint.

## What does good taste mean?

*The Gentlewoman* is a women's version of the niche bi-annual magazine for gentlemen titled *Fantastic Man*, launched in 2005 by Dutch publishers Gert Jonkers and Jop van Bennekom. “Despite its relatively small print run, *Fantastic Man* caused a stir when it launched in 2005, familiar neither to the readers of glossy fashion magazines or conservative men’s titles of the sports-and-cars ilk. Mostly black and white, with its rule lines and two-column layout, its pared-back design and reams of text set it apart as a fashion magazine meant to be read and not just looked at”, wrote It's Nice That (Hawkins, 2015). *Fantastic Man* has released 28 issues to date and has a worldwide circulation of 88 000 copies. As Media Kit advertises, “*Fantastic Man* remains the definitive magazine for modern men who cherish singular style, intelligent journalism and wit” [5].

Sartorial understanding of the “substance” of clothes, intellectual elitism, an appreciation of well-made garments, the wearer’s personality, and the figure of the dandy are historical roots of men’s fashion culture. The figure of the female dandy is also an archetype (Navaz Batliwalla in her guide to gentlewoman's style named as predecessors Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, Jeanne Toussaint, Marlene Dietrich, Charlotte Perriand (Batliwalla 2016a: 10), but the transfer of this publishing vision to influential women's fashion magazine is significantly new.

Fashion has been traditionally understood as a manifestation of modernity. Charles Baudelaire writes about men interested in clothes in *The Painter of Modern Life*: “Contrary to what a lot of thoughtless people seem to believe, dandyism is not even an excessive delight in clothes and material. <...> For the perfect dandy, these things are no more than the symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his mind” (Baudelaire 2010: 50). The poet of modernity writes the following about women interested in clothes: “she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; as an idol, she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adorned” <...> “She is the object of the most intense admiration and interest that the spectacle of life can offer to man's contemplation” (Baudelaire 2017: 87). As Baudelaire puts it, women “exist much more for the joy of the observer than for their own” (ibid).

This image of the ideal and appealing woman has been typically constructed and constituted by fashion magazines. On the glossy pages a woman “becomes the raw material of Woman on which an excessive femininity will be mapped through the masquerade of fashion”, she is developed and fixed by the photographer (Sellers 1995: 25). As this paper attempts to show and unpack, today restricted representations of women in fashion media are challenged. The question we ask is whether fashion is still a vector for the modernity project characterised by idealised images, artifice, transitoriness. What kind of representations of fashion and women of fashion are modern now?

A very interesting investigation of changes happenings with our definitions of beauty and taste is SHOWstudio's “Ugly” series [6]. As fashion journalist Harriet Walker points out, beauty standards for women

used to be expensive-looking tans and hair-extensions, revealing, tight and highly sexualised clothes. Anything less than that used to be considered ugly and frigid. But that aesthetic has been unseated in recent years (Walker, 2014). “If the male gaze has historically been the filter for so much of what we believe to be beautiful, then, as we reach an era when feminism has become practically part of the vulgate, it makes sense to reject it” (ibid.). Walker refers to Phoebe Philo, Stella McCartney, Hannah McGibbon, Stefano Pilati, high street brand COS, and Scandinavian brands. “All the tropes that the Japanese made use of in the eighties, and which the Belgians took up in the nineties, both with the intention of disrupting the prevailing idea of beauty and perfection, of confronting us with something technically ‘ugly’ to an eye accustomed to the bourgeois standard. People were shocked then; are we now? Not particularly. What happened in previous decades was a jolt from outsiders, and what we are experiencing now comes from deep within the establishment. This version of ugly – that is, intellectual clothing which happens to be comfortable and alluring without revealing all – has been rebranded as good taste” (ibid.).

Fashion that plays to female gaze is the latest form of status-seeking. *The Gentlewoman* is a magazine that mediates and constitutes exactly this definition of “good taste”. Of course, the notion of taste in representations of women is constitutive and very complex. To quote again Simone de Beauvoir, “a woman who appeals too obviously to male desire is in bad taste; but one who seems to reject it is no more commendable” (Beauvoir 1997: 545).

### **About “gentlewomen” and for “gentlewomen”**

*The Gentlewoman* is published in London and has an international readership. The magazine is distributed worldwide, but a large proportion sells in the UK (51 %). 23 % is distributed to other European countries, 18 % – to USA and 8 % to rest of the world. According to Media Kit, 85 % are female readers and 15% male readers, the median age is 32 years (61% are 28–46 years). Average income is £87, 255 [4]. Accordingly, among *The Gentlewoman* advertisers are luxury fashion brands Gucci, Dior, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Saint Laurent, Miu Miu, Chanel, Giorgio Armani, Chloe, Burberry, Loewe, Givenchy, etc. The magazine is exclusive in terms of distribution, you cannot buy it just anywhere, but only in the specialised niche magazines' stores, art bookstores or through subscription.

Niche fashion magazines are the higher strata of the visual culture of fashion (Lynge-Jorlen 2012), symbol of status and image-defining accessories. With the rise of digital and the acceleration of fashion consumption, “slow” niche book-quality print is becoming more exclusive and desirable (Jamieson 2015). Readers collect magazines, keep them in their library, post in Instagram feeds to signify the “aestheticism” of their everyday life and their “cultural capital”. Clothing stores and cafes use the magazines like *The Gentlewoman* and *Fantastic Man* also as image-supporting accessories to emphasise the shared aesthetic and values. For example, you can find *The Gentlewoman* in the stores of high-street brand COS, which promotes itself as “offering reinvented classics and wardrobe essentials” and creating “pieces that are made to last beyond the season” [7].

You would not find mass fashion magazines with trends there.

For Critical Discourse Analysis it is crucial to consider the way the audience deal with texts and images based on their own personal disposition and cultural baggage (Kress 2010: 30). The reader of the *The Gentlewoman* is educated, bookish, tasteful, with interests in culture, literature, architecture, design, fashion, and music. Most of the readers according to the magazine's concept has a high income. It is a magazine about “gentlewomen” and for “gentlewomen”.

The discourses *The Gentlewoman* underpins and constitutes are feminism, ageing, inclusivity, sustainability, and ethic consumption. Among the themes is the idea of “authentic” representations of women, the idea of possessions, taste and self-expression through possessions, the question of longevity – both longevity of fashion and longevity of fashion media.

### **What does “modern” mean today**

*The Gentlewoman* is a bi-annual magazine and operates as a “slow” time-consuming medium – opposed to fast communication (produced with a different speed and attitude, it represents fashion as valuable material culture). The magazine works with paper as luxury material. To emphasise tactile quality, different types of paper are used: glossy, matte, book, texture, and toned paper. Reading the magazine is a markedly tactile experience.

*The Gentlewoman* is renowned for its high-quality graphic design (‘Best Editorial Design’ Design Week Awards, ‘Best Design Entire Magazine’ D&AD Awards). The art director of *The Gentlewoman* Veronica Ditting was trained in Amsterdam at Gerrit Rietveld Academy. Gert Jonkers and Jop van Bennekom, publishers of the magazine, are also Dutch graphic designers and editors. Dutch graphic design school is highly acknowledged as the most influential and innovative (Broos and Heftinh: 1993). “The uniquely Dutch embrace of a variety of artistic, philosophical and spiritual influences, from naturalism to formal rationalism, converged with typographic legacy and advancing commercial printing practices” (Cullen, 1995).

Fundamental to graphic design is the relationship between writing and imagery. *The Gentlewoman* is emphatically a magazine to *read* with long interviews and profiles: the proportion of texts and images is the same. Typographic style is minimalist and clean, mostly only two colors are used, layout is restrained and bookish (two-column, one-column), overall appearance is conscious and controlled.

At the same time there are elements of play and humour in the graphic design communication: attention to little charming details, unexpected frames and footnotes, outside-the-box graphic decisions. The intention to communicate with readers is also expressed by slightly changing editorial formats every issue, finding new style choices for the same elements, being interesting and surprising, not formally applying the same



typography scheme to every single issue, treating every issue as “a book” etc. This approach creates a sense of care, warmth, and an evolving dialog with readers.

For instance, one of the newly introduced editorial elements is the riddle on the list of content with the answer in the end of the magazine:

You don't need the astronomical expertise of Maggie Aderin-Pocock (interviewed on pages 120–123) to spot stars. The constellation on the left will be visible to readers in the northern hemisphere from October to March, Maggie says. Join the dots to find out which it is (clue: he always wear a belt). Answer on p. 337. (The Gentlewoman № 18, p. 84)

The magazine consists of the characters' profiles, one-page essays on modern details (“thoughtful expositions on the minutiae of the everyday, from a half glass of wine to the case for a quite life” (The Gentlewoman № 18, p. 86), and “stories on clothing” (artistic, photographic projects about garments with different witty themes, e.g. analysis of the construction of jeans). In the last-to-date issue (№ 18) there are 10 gentlewomen' profiles, 7 essays, and 8 “stories on clothing”.

The word “modern” is obviously the most frequent one in the magazine and can be found everywhere. In the table of contents of issue № 18, we see “modern waste” (interview with Skye Gyngell, owner of a restaurant with a daily menu that uses up yesterday's waste), modern details, modern stargazing Maggie Aderin-Pocock (interview with an astronomer), modern street (interview with streetwear designer Sofia Prantera), modern group (interview with guitar band Girl Ray). The magazine constitutes what “modern” means today.

### **With admiration and appreciation**

In verbal mode women are represented in texts of the journalists and also in captions to the images. A lexical analysis of the women's profiles in *The Gentlewoman* reveals a predominance of adjectives of admiration and appreciation such as *celebrated, remarkable, incredible, quintessential, amazing, spectacular, acclaimed, exceptional, fabulous, great, outspoken, uncontested, divine, luminous, phenomenal, unstoppable*. The magazine uses these “big words” generously, but in a very precise way, justifying them with facts about the professions, achievements and passions of the characters. It creates an impression that these adjectives of admiration are not full of pathos, empty “big words”, but that they literally mean what they say and translate emotions of true admiration, interest, and joy of conversation.

The title introduces to readers in laconic, well-thought-out form the character and her passion: “A British singer with incredible international appeal”, “The amazing bread girl from Paris”, “The campaigning supermodel who everybody loves”, “The happy fashion designer”, “The intriguing Welsh singer”, “The unstoppable New York journalist”, “The glamorous animal right activist”. In the first paragraph the age of the character is always mentioned:

At the age of 86, she's an inadvertent model for how to live one's later years with absolute imagination and style (Angela Lansbury's profile, issue 6, 2012).

Born at the time of the space race and Neil Armstrong, Maggie Aderin-Pocock, 50, built her own telescope while she was still at school in north London (Maggie Aderin-Pocock's profile, issue 18, 2018).

After the introduction *The Gentlewoman* magazine always refers to its interviewees by their first name, both in the body text and the captions. This choice brings the subjects closer to us.

### **Building a sensible wardrobe**

One of the aspects of the identity of the “gentlewoman” is her serious and personal attitude to clothes. The “gentlewomen” are not necessarily interested in fashion, but as a matter of fact, they can be very “anti-fashion”, as Andrea Zittel, featured in the issue № 11:

The rightly celebrated US artist Andrea Zittel, 49, wears the same clothes every day for weeks on end. It's part of her ongoing examination of our daily lives, aimed at discovering what we can live without (Andrea Zittel's profile, issue 11, 2015).

It is worth noticing that her “anti-fashion” outfit is described in the same highly detailed and professional way as garments from the latest luxury fashion collections:

She's sporting a floor-length A-line grey wool skirt sewn for her by a friend and based on a vintage black leather skirt Andrea found in a second-hand shop last year; She's paired it with a dark grey wool vest, which she crocheted herself and which she wears over an off-the-shelf long-sleeved black wool top (ibid).

The “gentlewoman” is interested in “wardrobe”, not in fashion trends. In the profile of Angela Lansbury we read:

Even her wardrobe is sensible – impervious to fashion trends, not stacked with designer labels or big-name luxury brands (Angela Lansbury's profile, issue 6, 2012).

At the same time the magazine successfully advertises big-name luxury brands (Matthews, 2015). Here we see new practices of representation of current seasonal ready-to-wear collections as not “in trend this season”, but “long-lasting”, substantial and “real” (Mikerina, 2016). The wearer's personal and conscious attitude to garments makes the difference.

The “gentlewomen” say that they love clothes, because clothes embody memories, send messages and express who they are.

She simply loves clothes. “I’ve kept the things that mean a lot to me: a vintage Chanel coat and a Mainboacher coat I bought with Hamish when I was his assistant; a Commes des Garçons dress I bought when I first moved to New York and Grace Coddington took me shopping”. And she still wears them. (Camilla Nickerson's profile, issue 9, 2014).

The idea to wear the same is repeated from profile to profile:

She herself often wears a black Sacai dress – a long-sleeved V-neck sweater-and-lace-skirt combo from 2013. “It’s easy to put into an existing wardrobe. And these aren’t clothes you tire of at the end of the season. These are the things you wear for years and years” (Chitose Abe's profile, issue 10, 2014).

“Each time, she wore the same chicly androgynous outfit” (Elizabeth Peyton's profile, issue 8, 2013).

“I find something I like, and then I wear it for a couple weeks at a time”, she says on her outfit. (Björk, issue 11, 2015)

Clothes are the joy, as the “gentlewomen” can very well demonstrate.

No white coat for Dr Frances – she maintains a fabulous wardrobe and happily wears it to appointments (Dr Frances's profile, issue 3, 2011).

Fatima is wearing a very happy-shouldered black blazer by GIORGIO ARMANI (Fatima Bhutto's profile, issue 3, 2011).

Katie, who just adores COMME DES GARÇONS, is wearing a black leather jacket from their BLACK line over a striped T-shirt by COMME DES GARÇONS PLAY and a gold-and-diamond paperclip necklace from her eponymous label, HILLIER (Katie Hillier's profile, issue 8, 2013).

Ever since she bought herself out of her major-label contract with BMG subsidiary Jive Records in 2004, Robyn has made music for girls and boys who dance alone in their bedrooms, who wear and say and do the things that make them happy (Robyn's profile, issue 10, 2014).

Among those women who are conscious about how they represent themselves are many admirers of the aesthetics and vision of Phoebe Philo, the cover character of the first issue of *The Gentlewoman*. Phoebe Philo's attitude to clothes (her creations for Céline in particular) is the following:

“They're well made and the fabrics are beautiful. So I believe they will last, as an investment. They're not something just to be thrown away” (Phoebe Philo's profile, issue 1, 2010).

The discourse of sustainability is dominant on the pages of *The Gentlewoman*, but not as a manifesto, rather

as a very relevant topic that is necessary to take into consideration today. It is not a magazine about sustainability, but a sustainable attitude to fashion is assumed.

“I know that I will only wear Veja trainers, but they have to look good. I'm not going sustainable if I'm going to look like a bag woman” (Skye Gyndel's profile, issue 18, 2018).

In the captions to the images of the subjects, the idea of possessions is always emphasized. They are wearing not only clothes from the latest collections but also “their own clothes”.

Martha sits under a print from her photography collection. She is wearing a vintage printed linen dress by GUY LAROCHE, a leather belt by HERMES and her own HERMES leather cuff. The watch and earrings are also Martha's own (Martha Lane Fox's profile, issue 5, 2012).

The multi talented Mica is an avid football fan. Here, she wears a black wool jacket by MARGARET HOWELL and a white sweatshirt from THE VINTAGE SHOWROOM. The T-shirt on page 212 is Mica's own. On page 210, she is wearing a black sweatshirt from THE VINTAGE SHOWROOM and her own jewellery (Mica Levi's profile, issue 12, 2015).

Women are presented as women of their “own style”, they wear clothes that they “want to wear”. To have your own style, to have your own wardrobe means to be “real”.

### **Having a voice**

But above all else the magazine foregrounds the “gentlewoman's” expertise. The magazine is not afraid to use professional and rather specific lexis. In issue № 18 Skye Gyndell passionately talks about biodynamic farming, Maggie Aderin-Pocock about space, archaeoastronomy and telescopes. Of course, they discuss a range of other interests and concerns too. For example, space scientist Maggie Aderin-Pocock raises the topic of inclusivity. Being Nigerian, at one of the companies where she works she was mistaken for a cleaner:

“Despite the fact that I was wearing a smart suit and carrying a briefcase. In the moment your gut reaction is to be angry – how could you be so prejudices? But in reality this is a structural problem within society, and I know that I too have my biases. We need to change things so that when my daughter, who is eight, is an adult she won't encounter the same problems” (The Gentlewoman № 18, p. 123).

### **On self-representation**

As has been pointed out above, the “gentlewoman” puts thought into the way she represents herself and is aware of the feminist debate. The representations of older characters break the stereotype of the “invisibility” of older women. As Angela Lansbury says in the issue № 6:

“It's worth it to continue to present yourself as a woman of loveliness and dignity, a woman who feels good and knows she's looking her best” (Angela Lansbury's profile, issue 6, 2012).

Honesty and sincerity are the values of the “gentlewoman”. It is not only about yourself, trustful and thoughtful relationships with others are important.

“You want people around you who are really kind and trusting, beautiful, loving, and you want things around you like that too” (Elizabeth Peyton's profile, issue 8, 2013).

“She may hold the secret to modern dressing and have modern living down to a fine art, but what Phoebe has learnt is that having it all doesn't necessarily mean doing it all yourself” (Phoebe Philo's profile, issue 1, 2010).

The tone the magazine uses in subjects' profiles is kind, warm, respectful, and professional. A typical caption to the image of the “gentlewoman” includes a description of her clothes, interesting facts about her, the reason to admire her, and the emotions she evokes in people:

This white crinked-cotton bra top and denim skirt ensemble by MIU MIU shows off Beyoncé's athletic physique to ravishing effect. The hardest-working woman in show business, Beyoncé is known to rep up to 100 squats, lunges and crunches and practices her choreography for up nine hours per day... in heels. Wow! (Beyoncé Knowles' profile, issue 7, 2013).

Another technique the journalists in *The Gentlewoman* apply to represent their characters as “real” is the use of third voices – quotations of opinions on them by other people.

“She's a tremendous woman”, said the designer Vivienne Westwood, her good friend and mentor. “I wish there were more like her in this world, because then it would be a better place. I'm not talking about her looks; I'm talking about her spirit. Pamela embodies beauty and intelligence. Not only is she a sex icon, she's a superwoman” (Pamela Anderson's profile, issue 12, 2015).

“She hates the word, but I think Léa is very modern. Everything about her is modern. She fits perfectly with current fashion because she has the face, the talent, an amazing personality, and she's different from the rest” (Léa Seydoux's profile, issue 8, 2013).

## **Emotive photography**

The very involvement of the magazine's editorial team inevitably militates against the “authenticity”, because to pose and to be styled means to be “fake”. Taking this into account, images of *The Gentlewoman's* subjects are produced with the goal not to look like “posed images”. The women can look at the viewer or not, but we feel that the images are “demand images” in Kress and van Leeuwen's terminology (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 118). Our emotional response is required, because the subjects look relaxed, natural and approachable.

The photographs in *The Gentlewoman* magazine are very often black-and-white. It is a “slow” magazine, and black-and-white photography assumes timeless connotations. With black-and-white images of the subjects, the tone of the representation is quiet, calm and confident. Very often the magazine uses close shots to signify intimacy, inner states and feelings of the characters and to take us close to the “real”. Black-and-white close shots emphasise emotions, because looking at a subject’s face, without the distraction of colour, creates a strong connection.

The magazine also often uses medium shots that show us what the woman is wearing and show us the settings, her surroundings. Here the magazine very often uses a “representational trick”: the caption to the image does not describe the image (the representation of the real garment). Instead, it describes the real garment that we do not see on the image. In the captions, clothes are described in a very detailed and professional manner, but in the image we often see only a very small and fragmentary part of them or do not see them at all (Mikerina, 2016). The images are often black and white but the colours of garments are described in a very specific and sophisticated way.

Maggie is wearing a claret merino-silk crew-neck jumper by SUSPEL with her own jewellery (issue 18, p. 121 – the image is black and white and we almost do not see the jumper, because it is a close shot).

Sally Philips is wearing a honey reversible gaberdine car coat by BURBERRY, high-waisted jeans by J BRAND and black leather shoes by SANDRO. The 18-carat gold-plated Dali and Falless silver earrings are by CHARLOTTE CHESNAIS (issue 17, p. 106 – the image is black and white and we almost do not see jeans and earrings).

On pages 147 and 148, Anthea wears a grey-and-yellow double-breasted check wool jacket and matching pleated wool trousers by PAUL SMITH. The white T-shirt is by SUNSPEL (issue 17 – the image is black and white).

Here, Tavi wears an indigo denim jacket with contrast stitching by DIANE VON FURSTENBERG (issue 17, p. 172 – we see only few centimetres of the jacket and from the back).

Here and on the page 203, Alison is wearing a red-and-black polka dot printed denim coat over a white cotton T-shirt, both by PRADA. The black silk trousers are by THE ROW (issue 17 – we do not see the trousers at all and hardly see the T-shirt).

This device adds a layer of “reality” to the representation of the actual outfit, and at the same time underlines that the magazine uses a less explicit and a more elitist mode of representation of fashion.

To represent a “gentlewoman” as “real”, she should be shot in a “real” place – her home or office. The origin of the time and space of the images is highlighted in the captions. The scheme of the caption that is supposed to bring the character closer to us is to describe the real location, the subject’s own clothes and add some

interesting facts. Here are a few examples:

The tireless and terrific director was photographed in her home city of Los Angeles, taking moments out from the frenetic activity that has surrounded the release of her breakout film, *Selma*. Ava wears her own clothes here and throughout (Ava DuVerney, issue 11, 2015).

A series of personal portraits of Phoebe by David Sims, taken at Spring Studios and at her home. She is wearing her favourite pieces from her Céline collections and her own wardrobe (Phoebe Philo's profile, issue 1, 2010).

Thanks to 30 years in the industry, Camilla has a highly desirable collection of clothes, from vintage to contemporary. Photographed here with her two sons, Atticus and Jackson, in these portraits she wears a selection of her favourite pieces (Camilla Nickerson's profile, issue 9, 2014).

Agnes Varda has been styling her hair in its signature duotone bowl cut since 1998. On these pages she is wearing her own clothes. For the cover, Agnes Varda was photographed in Paris by Alasdair McLellan, wearing her own clothes, including a custom-made silk cardigan by GUCCI (Agnes Varda's profile, issue 18, 2018).

The magazine works with the fashion industry's leading photographers. Of course, the images visibly use means of visual representation, i.e. manipulation of details such as backgrounds, tone, color saturation etc. They explicitly change "reality" but at the same time they appear candid. In Kress's terminology, they are emotionally resonant images and what matters is neither the truth of verisimilitude, but "sensory" truth (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 161).

### **"Sincere simulations" in the fashion discourse**

The magazine *The Gentlewoman* uses a conversational, professional, yet playful tone and emotionally resonant photography to encourage the reader to feel sympathy and warmth towards the "gentlewoman". As we can see, the representations of "real" women in *The Gentlewoman* are very thought-out, self-conscious and calculated. Does it mean that we should not believe them?

A social semiotic theory does not claim to establish the truth of representation. There is no neutral way to represent a person, the representation is always created based on the "interest" that explains represented criterial aspects of the subject (Kress 2010: 24). The "interest" of *The Gentlewoman's* editorial team is to communicate "a sense of sincerity". The editorial team of *The Gentlewoman* is highly self-conscious about their goal to represent women "authentically", which also entails respect and appreciation.

In my view, this idea of "sincere simulations" has gained significance in contemporary fashion discourse. I like the definition of "authenticity" as "an irresistible combination of sincerity with authority", proposed by

Dejan Sudjic, director of the Design Museum in London (Sudjic 2015: 3). I believe this is the case with *The Gentlewoman*: the attitude is sincere, but to make it work the representations must be controlled and carefully thought-out.

As the growing popularity of the “gentlewoman” fashion identity demonstrates, “true” personal qualities are gaining strength in current discourse of fashion. To be an honest, kind, unpretentious and contemplative person means belonging to “high” fashion culture. This shift is significantly new and redefines the very definition of “fashion” and luxury. From this perspective, fashion is not mediated as a “dream”. It is represented as a “real” and valuable part of our material culture. And we thoughtfully relate to this culture with conscious, emotional and ethical attitude.



## Notes

- [1] <https://thegentlewoman.co.uk/>
- [2] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- [3] <https://www.websters1913.com>
- [4] [http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/The\\_Gentlewoman\\_MediaKit\\_2018.pdf](http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/The_Gentlewoman_MediaKit_2018.pdf)
- [5] [http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/Fantastic\\_Man\\_MediaKit\\_2018.pdf](http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/Fantastic_Man_MediaKit_2018.pdf)
- [6] <http://showstudio.com/project/ugly>
- [7] [https://www.cosstores.com/en\\_eur/customer-service/about-cos.html](https://www.cosstores.com/en_eur/customer-service/about-cos.html)

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