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**Avedon's Creature:
Parody, Performance, and Commerce in *The Fabulous Fifties***

Although Richard Avedon produced thousands of advertisements during the course of his long career, it is difficult to discuss the role of commercial images within his larger practice as very little documentation of this work survives. After the completion of each advertising job, Avedon typically submitted the resulting photographs to the agency or client that commissioned the project. What little remained in his holdings was discarded in the years leading up to his death in 2004. Although little remains in the archive, Avedon still considered his advertising work to be a significant aspect of his practice, stating in 1965 that, “I think that my creative work in advertising is the hardest, most honest work that I do. There are no illusions. . . . [The ads] are records of the world we live in and it’s possible that the record of my ads over the past twenty years could be a more valuable social document than a record of what I think are my finest fashion photographs.”¹

Understanding this critically underappreciated chapter of Avedon’s career offers new and exciting perspectives on the photographer’s oeuvre. Over the past two years, The Richard Avedon Foundation has recovered hundreds of ads with the aid of Avedon’s meticulously kept datebooks and newly available online databases of mid-century magazines. This research has culminated in the recently published *Avedon Advertising*, the most extensive survey of the photographer’s commercial work to date. As new photos are identified, a more complex picture

¹ As quoted in Laura Avedon, James Martin, and Rebecca Arnold, *Avedon Advertising* (New York: Abrams, 2019): 5.

of Avedon's ad work is just beginning to emerge, particularly with regard to the 1950s — arguably the most prolific era of his commercial practice.²

Insight into this body of work is preserved within an unexpected cultural artifact: a musical comedy revue titled *The Fabulous Fifties*, which aired on CBS on January 31, 1960. Sponsored by General Electric, the star-studded TV special recapped the social, political, and technological changes of the 1950s. Avedon directed a segment for the special, titled *The Creature*, that parodied several of the decade's most memorable print ads — many of which were shot by the photographer himself. The sketch was created by Avedon and his frequent collaborator, supermodel Suzy Parker, along with comedian and director Mike Nichols.³

Parker stars as the Creature, a shapeshifting saleswoman manufactured by the ad industry to sell cosmetics, clothing, and other goods to female consumers. From virginal bride to femme fatale, Parker occupies a range of female stereotypes, finding humor in the failings of each role she inhabits. As a formal device, the use of parody in *The Creature* operates on multiple levels to critique mass-mediated femininity and provides unique insight into how Avedon navigated the world of advertising.

To fully unpack Avedon's skit, one must examine the cultural context of the television spectacular — or special, as it is more commonly known — in relation to both the advertising and artistic communities in postwar America. In the 1950s, spectacles represented some of the most ambitious attempts to create an aesthetic experience specific to television, combining vaudeville-style entertainment with bold modernist sets and graphic interludes. Organized

² Ibid.

³ The official credit for sketch "Created by Richard Avedon, Written by Mike Nicholas, Directed by Normal Jewison." While Suzy Parker is only credited for her performance, archival documents in the Leland Hayward papers at the New York Public Library suggest that Parker played an active role in the writing process. Richard Avedon to Leland Hayward, "Memo," December 15, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Leland Hayward Papers, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York (hereinafter "Hayward Papers").

around a central theme, these one-off events had a much higher production value than everyday programming and were often funded by corporate sponsors.⁴

Spectaculars blurred the line between creative and commercial content, presenting advertisements in the form of entertainment. This effect was produced visually, as ads were built into the narrative and aesthetic structure of the program. Since their inception, critics have written about spectaculars in aesthetic terms. Television producers adopted the name spectacular from the original term used for the electronic signs and billboards that decorated Times Square in the 1930s, copyrighted by lighting designer Douglas Leigh.⁵ In a similar manner, TV spectaculars employed graphic spectacle and camp to direct viewers' attention toward specific products. Spectaculars frequently cast cultural figures who worked in higher art forms in order to raise television's status as an artistic medium.⁶ As a major manufacturer of televisions, GE found the medium-affirming aspects of the spectacular particularly useful and was one of the leading sponsors of televised specials throughout the 1950s and 60s.⁷

It is in this context that *The Fabulous Fifties* emerged. This production was GE's most ambitious spectacular at the date of its premiere in January 1960. While the special was promoted as a nostalgic retrospective of the past decade, its tone and visuals were heavily informed by GE's slogan, "progress is our most important product." The special's aesthetic components were under the direction of Charles and Ray Eames, who were primarily known for their modernist design and architecture practice.⁸ The Eameses dabbled in television and film

⁴ Lynn Spiegel, "Back to the Drawing Board: Graphic Design and the Visual Environment of Television at Midcentury," *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 4 (2016): 37-38.

⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁶ Spiegel cites Ben Shahn, Andy Warhol, Paul Strand, and Saul Bass among others as artists that were at one point involved in television production. Spiegel, "Back to the Drawing Board," 27.

⁷ GE's best-known spectacular is *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964), a Christmas classic that is still widely broadcast to this day. Other high-profile spectaculars include *Light's Diamond Jubilee* (1954), a celebration of Thomas Edison, which features an appearance by President Eisenhower. Ibid, 37.

⁸ This tagline was frequently stated throughout the special. Ibid, 40.

production throughout the 1950s and 60s and were interested in pushing the medium to its technological limits. They were some of the earliest proponents of green screen technology and readily employed a mix of live, taped, and animated video in their work for television.⁹ Leland Hayward, the producer of *The Fabulous Fifties*, hired the duo in the hope of aligning their distinctly modern viewpoint with GE's commercial and technological ambitions.¹⁰

Hayward had similar intentions when he contacted Avedon in August of 1959 to join the production.¹¹ A mainstay of the pages of *Harper's Bazaar*, Avedon is largely credited with setting off an artistic revolution in fashion photography. As opposed to the rigid formality characteristic of earlier images, Avedon's editorial work was unique in its immediacy, exuberance, and humanity. A 1958 profile on the photographer published in the *New Yorker* suggested that, "a good deal of this accomplishment can be attributed to his imagination and resourcefulness in handling a camera, but some of it undoubtedly stems from the fact that his primary interest is not in fashion but in women."¹² Instead of purely aestheticizing his subjects Avedon was known for cultivating deep relationships with models, collaborating with them in a manner similar to that of a film director with his actors. This "directorial" approach behind the camera is also evident formally in his photographs, which emphasize movement and narrative.

Concurrent to his magazine work, the photographer began an incredibly lucrative advertising practice. Companies from Revlon to Pabst reportedly paid Avedon thousands of dollars for a single job— exponentially more than the photographer made for a multi-page fashion spread in *Harper's Bazaar*, which averaged around \$200.¹³ According to photo historian

⁹ Ibid, 42.

¹⁰ "Leland Hayward Presents the Fabulous Fifties," July 1959, box 110: folder 14, p. 1, Hayward Papers.

¹¹ Leland Hayward to Richard Avedon, "Night Cable," August 20, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

¹² Winthrop Sargeant, "A Woman Entering a Taxi in the Rain," *The New Yorker*, 38, 34 (November 8, 1958): 49.

¹³ Phyllis Lee Levin, "Fantasy Marks the Work of Fashion Photographer," *The New York Times* (April 5, 1957): 39

Sue E. Atkinson, to navigate the crowded market, advertisers turned to fashion photographers like Avedon to give ads “something of the excitement that had always been reserved for a magazine’s editorial pages — where photographs existed often full page, uncluttered by headlines, [and] trademarks.”¹⁴ In magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish editorial content from advertisements.

No ad embodies this practice more than Avedon’s famous “Fire & Ice” campaign for Revlon in 1952 (Figure 1). The ad features a photograph of a model in a skin-tight silver dress with bright red lips and matching nails accompanied by a provocative line of copy that reads, “Are you made for Fire and Ice?” To help readers answer this question on their own, Revlon included a fifteen-question quiz below the headline. The quiz, a feature normally reserved for the editorial section of a magazine, playfully prompts readers with suggestive copy: “Do you dance with your shoes off? Do you think any man *really* understands you? Would you streak your hair with platinum without consulting your husband?”¹⁵

As a commercial photographer, Avedon was lauded for his ability to apply his personal style across a variety of different media. In a 1957 profile for *The New York Herald Tribune*, Avedon outlined how his work in fashion, film, and advertising overlapped through the evolution of a single photographic technique: the placement of colored lights behind a model in order to create a halo-like effect (Figure 2). Avedon developed this method while working as a staff photographer at *Harper’s Bazaar* in the early 1950s. In 1955, he was asked to shoot a Helena Rubinstein ad featuring Suzy Parker and jazz musician Dave Brubeck in the same style. The

¹⁴ Sue E. Atkinson, “Advertising and Fashion Photography: A Short Survey,” *The British Journal of Photography* 128, no. 6295 (March 20, 1981): 313.

¹⁵ “Fire and Ice,” *Vogue*, 120, 8 (November 1, 1952): 28-29.

image was then used as the cover art for Brubeck's album *Red Hot and Cool*, in addition to being circulated as an advertisement (Figures 3 A & B).

Shortly afterwards, Avedon was approached by the director of *Funny Face* to help adapt the aesthetic used in the Helena Rubinstein ad for a scene in the film (Figure 4). A few months after the movie's release, this scene in *Funny Face* was used as the inspiration for a cover of *LIFE* that featured comedian Ernie Kovacs in front of a row of colored lights (Figure 5). Maidenform later approached Avedon with a copy of this *LIFE* cover to see if he could replicate the effect in an advertisement for the bra company, to which the photographer threw up his hands and laughed.¹⁶ In addition to illustrating the circuitous and often confusing flow of ideas, this anecdote speaks to Avedon's comfort with switching between and imitating different commercial modes.

With this in mind, Hayward hired Avedon to create a segment for *The Fabulous Fifties*, which the producer believed shared similar hybrid qualities to Avedon work. Originally, Hayward envisioned Avedon's segment as a documentary piece on the changing role of women in 1950s America that would star Marilyn Monroe.¹⁷ Of course, considering the patriarchal nature of 1950s America, to call Hayward's proposal a documentary would be a stretch. In a letter sent to Avedon on September 30, 1959, Hayward stated that:

The so-called emancipation of women has had deep results...The statistics are staggering. There are 1,513,000 more women. They live seven years longer...They have over a third of the jobs....They have sixty percent of the wealth...Are we entering a new society in which I suppose for the first time since Greek and Roman civilization, a new state is created where women run everything, and the men are slaves to the women... What do our American women want? why are they so unhappy? Where do men fail them? Are they as bad as we think? Are they as bad as we think? Perhaps we can find out by the end of the show or the end of the Marilyn Monroe section, that women aren't that terrible.

¹⁶ Joseph Kaselow, "Advertising Field: He Can't Dance," *New York Herald Tribune* (May 12, 1957): A7.

¹⁷ Leland Hayward to Richard Avedon, "Night Cable," August 20, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

That what they really want is to have a strong man to be married to, and to have him be strong and able enough to run the household.”¹⁸

Avedon initially hesitated to accept Hayward’s offer, suggesting in a telegram that it would put Monroe in an “untenable position.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, he accepted and was introduced to Mike Nichols, who was to help the photographer write the script. However, early in the writing process, Monroe dropped out of the production, facing pressure from her husband, Arthur Miller, who viewed television as beneath Monroe’s talent.²⁰

CHANGEAfter the loss of Monroe in November 1959, Suzy Parker was hired as her replacement.²¹ Parker, Avedon’s frequent collaborator, was one of the first supermodels to achieve name-brand recognition, starring in thousands of editorial spreads and ad campaigns throughout the 1940s and 50s. Parker was increasingly dissatisfied with the fashion world at the close of the 1950s. From a two-year apprenticeship with French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson to several bit parts in Hollywood movies, Parker repeatedly attempted to quit modeling, but she found her reputation difficult, if not impossible, to escape.²²

Although perceived as the very image of femininity, Parker herself did not conform to traditional expectations of her gender. Parker, who described herself as being “too independent” to be supported by a man, used modeling as a means to obtain financial freedom.²³ In a

¹⁸ Leland Hayward to Richard Avedon, “Formal proposal for The Fabulous Fifties,” September 30, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

¹⁹ Richard Avedon to Leland Hayward, “Haywire Network,” August 21, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

²⁰ A lengthy letter to CBS executive Richard Levine, sent a month before Monroe’s departure, details Arthur Miller’s dissent. Leland Hayward to Richard Levine, “The Marilyn Monroe Manner,” September 4, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

²¹ Richard Avedon to Leland Hayward, “Memorandum,” November 23, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

²² James L. Kilgallen. “Suzy’s on Both Sides of the Camera,” *The Washington Post* (November 7, 1957): 27.

²³ Bob Thomas, “Suzy Says She’ll Never Marry — She Says,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (May 7, 1957): 31

particularly candid interview with *The New York Herald Tribune* in 1957, Parker stated, “I hate modeling but it is the easiest way of making money quickly so I can do the things I like.”²⁴

On December 15, 1959, less than a month before the premiere of the special, Avedon notified Hayward that he and Parker were in the process of rewriting the script with Nichols’ assistance:

Here is an idea of what we plan to do. After a documentary introduction covering the growth of advertising in the fifties and how billions of dollars are spent on glamour promotion, we will do a series of the most opulent ads of the decade, asking who the people in these ads are, and what combination of circumstances led them into the bizarre poses in which we are used to seeing them. We will start with a still photograph of a high fashion ad, with its “poetic” copy read aloud, and then bring that to life in order to examine the “family life” of this beautiful Creature on the tiger skin rug. There will be five or eight such “revelations” that Suzy, as America’s Greatest Saleswoman, will shed a little satiric light on.²⁵

When Parker joined *The Fabulous Fifties*, the format of Avedon’s segment shifted to parody, an occurrence that appears to be more than coincidental. As collaborators on some of the decade’s most memorable print ads, Parker and Avedon were uniquely suited to this task. By the end of the 1950s, Avedon and Parker were both grappling with the creative limitations of their respective professions. The use of parody allowed the duo to reveal and refashion the rigid language of advertising to suit their own creative ambitions.

Interestingly, the character devised by Avedon and Parker is “the Creature” — and not “the Goddess” or “Madonna” — evoking something of the grotesque or artificial, not dissimilar to Frankenstein’s monster. The intentionality behind this choice seems to suggest the duo’s horror over the fact that they had little control over their work — and in Parker’s case, her likeness — once it was released to the wider commercial market. When asked what it was like to

²⁴ Joe Hyams, “Cover Girl Discovered by Movies,” *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962); (April 15, 1957): 14.

²⁵ Richard Avedon to Leland Hayward, “Memo,” December 15, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

model on a press junket for *The Fabulous Fifties*, Parker stated that “you begin to feel that you’re not real at all. You’re ‘the creature’ who smokes all those cigarettes, uses all that lipstick, wears all those strange fashions, hypnotizes men with all that perfume.... You see your face staring at you from every magazine and sometimes as big as the side of a house from billboards. You wonder if you’re really a person or only a symbol.”²⁶

Parker’s statement embodies the problem of the feminine masquerade, an idea first theorized by Joan Riviere in 1929 and elaborated upon by Jacques Lacan in the 1970s.²⁷ In order to exist within a patriarchal society, a woman must be seen. To be seen, she must adopt the facade of womanliness, masking her body in overtly feminine signifiers. Consumption is central to the production of femininity, particularly within the historical context of postwar America, a period in which the market for goods such as cosmetics, clothing, and homeware grew exponentially. *The Creature* frames modeling as a form of invisible labor that deeply influences the construction of femininity in the larger consumer culture.

This type of masquerade is effectively subverted in the skit’s parodic format, which by definition assumes the very shape of its target as a mode of critique. In more ways than one, the sketch’s structure also resembles that of a contemporaneous piece of cultural criticism: Marshall McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride*. McLuhan’s text consists of 60 short essays, each of which analyzes the formal qualities of a particular advertisement, comic strip, or newspaper layout to discuss the hidden ways in which mechanically reproduced images have shaped modern identity. Avedon and Nichols identified the book as a source of inspiration for *The Creature* in multiple letters to Hayward, expressing specific interest in McLuhan’s discussion of subliminal

²⁶ Dorothy Rowe, “Suzy Symbolizes the Fabulous Fifties,” *Tucson Daily Citizen* (January 30, 1960): 21.

²⁷ For detailed analysis of femininity as masquerade see Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

messaging and other hidden modes of manipulation.²⁸ As indicated by the book's title, one of McLuhan's primary interests is the production of gender — not so much in the personal sense, but from a capitalist standpoint. As McLuhan states in his introduction, “This book reverses that process by providing typical visual imagery of our environment and dislocating it into meaning by inspection.”²⁹ In a similar manner to McLuhan's book, *The Creature* “dislocates” its source material from its printed context and refunctions it through the medium of television as a means of critique.

Notably, McLuhan does not take a moral position on the matter of advertising.³⁰ At one point in the text, McLuhan likens his stance to that of the imperiled sailor in Edgar Allan Poe's *Descent into the Maelström*, who saved himself from drowning in a whirlpool by studying the movement of objects within the environment with “amusement” rather than fear or resentment. McLuhan specifies: “It was this amusement born of his rational detachment as a spectator of his own situation that gave him the thread which led him out of the Labyrinth. And it is in the same spirit that this book is offered as amusement.”³¹

In a similar manner, *The Creature* critiques the absurdities of postwar advertising with “amusement,” rather than in an overly indignant or didactic manner. However, unlike Poe's sailor, Avedon was not just a passive viewer of this “Maelström” — if anything, he was an active agent in its creation. As Irving Penn stated in a 1964 lecture, “Avedon was riding a kind of stream, not going up stream... With brilliant energy he pulled her together by shrewd

²⁸ The earliest mention of *The Mechanical Bride* is in “Excerpt from telephone conversation today between Lealand Hayward and Mike Nicholds” September 30, 1959, box 110, folder 4, Hayward Papers.

²⁹ Marshal McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, (Boston, Mass: Beacon, 1967, reprint from 1951), 1.

³⁰ Moira Roth, “The Aesthetic of Indifference,” *Artforum*, no.3 (November 1997): 46-53.

³¹ McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 1.

manipulation, anger, and insistence and has pulled in his direction with his strength to produce the Avedon woman. She's [a] very real woman and not to be mixed up with any other age."³²

Although Penn, as Avedon's rival, should be taken with a grain of salt, in *The Creature*, Avedon appears to embrace this role as an all-powerful creator. References to both Avedon and Parker's past work are sprinkled throughout the sketch, suggesting an attempt to declare authorship or reclaim creative agency. These jokes operate on a subliminal level, as it is unclear whether viewers outside the advertising industry would recognize any of the meta-references. Nevertheless, their omnipresence in the skit is a theatrical, if not ostentatious, display of the pair's collective influence on consumer imagery.

The Creature opens with a shot of the spectacular's host, Henry Fonda, against a blank background. An icon of Hollywood masculinity, Fonda is the foil to Parker's hyperfeminine persona. Fonda opens with the following declarative statement: "If man has definite ideas about anything, he has definite ideas about woman — God love her." Fonda continues: "as for her, she has definite ideas about herself," while walking over to a mannequin with strikingly similar features to Parker (Figure 6). It's possible that the mannequin was in fact sculpted after Parker, as it was common practice in the 1950s to feature replicas of famous models, actresses, and other celebrities in store windows.³³ In fact, Bonwit Teller featured an Avedon-themed display in May 1957, installing Avedon's camera equipment and several mannequins based on the

³² Excerpted from a lecture given Alexey Brodovitch's Design Laboratory class at the Steve Frankfurt Advertising Agency. It should be noted that Brodovitch was both Avedon and Penn's teacher. "Brodovitch Workshop Transcript for 11/18/1964," Alexey Brodovitch File, Box 1, The Richard Avedon Foundation.

³³ A particularly fascinating article on the subject published in *The Wall Street Journal* reads: "How would you like to have a life sized Suzy Parker? Or another top fashion model of your own. Well now you can by simply dispatching a check for \$200 to Mary Brosnan Inc here and mentioning the lady of your choice....The mannequins are fashioned from life or photographs and sold mainly to retail stores, but any gentleman who considers himself a Pygmalion and is in touch with Aphrodite can be one too." "Man, These Mannikins — How They Shape Up," *Wall Street Journal* (January 18, 1957): 1.

photographer's own likeness in the window (Figure 7).³⁴ Paired with Fonda's statement, the Parker look-alike highlights the disembodied qualities of both Parker and Avedon's profession.

This idea is further reinforced as Fonda walks toward several magazine covers featuring Parker in the guise of multiple female personas (Figure 8). Three of the four covers were shot by Avedon, and each was produced with different visual languages in relation to Parker's particular character — from the girl next door to the vampy pinup (Figures 9 A, B, C, & D).³⁵ Standing in front of the covers, Fonda states that the advertising industry has “created a new variation of the American women” called “the Creature.” The camera then pans to Parker lounging on a tiger skin rug in front of a blank studio backdrop (Figure 10). Lynn Spiegel has previously suggested that this establishing shot of Parker is modeled after a 1959 Avedon portrait of Marilyn Monroe published in *LIFE* magazine (Figure 11). However, the scene is in fact nearly identical to a 1957 print ad for a Bliss! hair dye, which happens to be another Avedon/Parker collaboration (Figure 12)

As in the sketch, in the print ad, Parker wears a lamé shirt and lies on a tiger skin rug against a nondescript background. Next to Parker, the word “Bliss!” appears a total of eight times, printed in a different color and font than the rest of the copy. The repetition of this small but effective differentiation almost gives the appearance of hypnotic speech. Parker's unwavering gaze lines up with the exact midpoint of the page, reinforcing her central and magnetic presence within the structure ad. In the sketch, Parker reproduces a similar trance-inducing gaze — at one point during her conversation with Fonda, she goes nearly 30 seconds

³⁴ Information provided by the Richard Avedon Foundation.

³⁵ See figure list for publication information.

without blinking. When Fonda asks the Creature what she's made of, Parker wryly responds: "Kodachrome, honey."

The first satirical ad — a sendup of Revlon's Flama Grande lipstick, titled "Flama Grosso" — appears shortly after this exchange (Figure 13) The original ad, published in *Vogue*, features a confident young woman dancing with a Spanish bullfighter, whose whip is wrapped firmly around her waist; notably, in the version that appeared in *Seventeen*, the whip was removed while the rest of the image was left unchanged (Figures 14 A & B).³⁶ Diverging from the print ad, in the sketch, Parker plays a naïve American tourist increasingly troubled by the Spaniard's repeated sexual advances, which culminate in an aggressive kiss. Parker turns to the camera and says with exasperation, "Good grief! And I wasn't even supposed to drink the water."

The parody, in addition to highlighting the sexually aggressive nature of the original Revlon ad, puts unusual emphasis on Parker's status as a female tourist, a role with deep political resonance in the context of postwar Spanish–American relations. The inordinate amount of Spanish-inspired imagery found in women's magazine advertisements of the time was in fact a highly coordinated effort on behalf of the Spanish government, which had hired a prominent Madison Avenue advertising agency to lobby American companies to produce ads featuring Spain to encourage tourism.³⁷ Ironically enough, Avedon was involved in one of the most notable instances of this influence campaign. In 1955, Helena Rubinstein and Iberia Air (the official airline of the Spanish state) announced a new collaboration: the production of a new

³⁶ "Flama Grande," *Vogue*, 134, 17 (October 15, 1959): 14-5 and "Flama Grande," *Seventeen*, 18, 11 (November 1959): 6-7.

³⁷ In addition to this special issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, Helena Rubinstein sponsored a competition that encouraged store owners to make their own Torrero Pink-inspired window displays, promising the winner an all-expenses-paid trip to Spain. Neal M. Rosendorf, *Franco Sells Spain to America: Hollywood, Tourism and Public Relations as Postwar Spanish Soft Power* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY, 2014).

shade of lipstick called “Torero Pink.” The product was rolled out in the April 1955 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* in a lavish ad shot by Avedon (Figures 165 A & B). Beyond the ad, editorial mentions of the color are printed throughout the magazine as well as in ads produced by over a half a dozen other companies.³⁸

The next fake ad featured in *The Creature* is for Flord, an obvious jab at Ford, and features Parker as a bride with her new husband driving off to their honeymoon (Figure 16). Enjoying her new car, Parker exclaims, “Why even go to the hotel at all? Let’s just drive and drive and never stop,” to which her husband turns to the camera and makes a face of utter dismay. From Ford to Cadillac and General Motors, car ads featured wedding themes that positioned their product as an essential part of any successful new marriage (Figures 17 A, B, & C). In contrast with girlish fantasies found in car ads in women’s magazines, ads geared toward men were explicitly sexual. This difference was noted by McLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride*. In a chapter titled “Husband’s Choice,” McLuhan reprints a Buick ad that reads “Ready, Willing — and Waiting,” among other sexually suggestive copy (Figure 18).³⁹ The car, at once feminized in a sexual manner, is also presented as a “phallic power symbol.”⁴⁰ McLuhan states that “the fact that these conflicting wishes are incorporated unconsciously in a wide range of popular objects testifies at once to their prevalence and to the character of the collective trance which prevents the recognition of the tensions.”⁴¹ In the skit, the husband’s clear disappointment in Parker’s lack of interest in sex highlights this dual consciousness.

³⁸ Ibid, 99.

³⁹ McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston, Mass: Beacon, 1967, reprint from 1951), 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 83.

⁴¹ Ibid, 84.

This was not the only commentary on marriage in *The Creature*. A parodic segment for Schmeerof Vodka, inspired by Bert Stern's famous ads for Smirnoff, also involves a husband and wife pair (Figure 19). Stern's original campaign featured several striking images of posh men and women in the desert and was widely celebrated for its artistic qualities (Figures 20 A & B).⁴² In the skit, a couple sits in a barren tree as the husband waxes poetic on his love for the desert, expressing his satisfaction with the decision to move away from larger civilization. Parker responds by dryly asking for a divorce. The skit not only comments on the absurd premise of Stern's ads, but it also puts into question the presence of female happiness within a male fantasy.

The next segment, a parody of Rheingold Beer, recenters this critique in relation to the female body (Figure 21). Throughout the 1940s and 50s, the company ran an annual beauty pageant called Miss Rheingold. Each year, Rheingold selected six beautiful young women among thousands of applicants to be featured in ads as well as on billboards and beer cans distributed across the country (Figures 22 A & B). In voting booths located in bars, supermarkets, and delicatessens, Rheingold offered Americans the chance to vote on their favorite contestant, an election that at its height surpassed 23 million votes.⁴³ Miss Rheingold was always white, Christian, and middle class, and curiously, she was never pictured drinking the product she advertised. This is not the case in *The Creature*, which features Parker as "Miss Meingold," who loudly hiccups after announced as the winner of the competition. In drawing attention to a normal bodily function, Parker's parody puts into question the laughable level of idealization of the Miss Rhiengold pageant.

⁴²Carl Spielvogel, "Advertising: A Picture's Worth a Thousand: In Dollars or Words, Agencies Put High Value on Photos," *The New York Times* (October 18, 1959): F10.

⁴³"Strenuous," *The New Yorker* (September 21, 1957): 35-36.

The next skit, a parody of Winston Cigarettes, deals with the absurd in the realm of language. In 1954, the company introduced a new tagline: “Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should!” (Figure 23). The slogan deliberately flaunted grammatical conventions by using “like” instead of “as,” causing controversy among grammar nerds across the country.⁴⁴ Approaching Winston’s famous tagline from a literal standpoint, Parker puts a cigarette in her mouth and proceeds to eat it (Figure 24).

The last satirical ad, a sendup of Maidenform’s famous “I dreamed…” campaign, ends on a rather dark note. From 1949 to 1969, Maidenform produced over 100 ads that featured scantily clad women in Maidenform bras confronting a variety of different inventive scenarios, often in the workplace. Some scholars have argued that the ads, while ostensibly a celebration of female imagination, stressed the unreality of such professional opportunities for women.⁴⁵ These ads often reinforced stereotypical associations between a woman’s sexual autonomy and danger, such as one image that features a cowgirl brazenly pointing her gun at the camera (Figure 25). Designed to look like a wanted poster, this ad was in fact shot by Avedon, who contributed several other photographs to the campaign.⁴⁶ Parker stars in a fictional “Ladenform” ad as an international spy, donning a Russian fur cap and film noir–style cigarette holder (Figure 26). Shortly after the print image switches to film, she is shot by an offscreen machine gun and collapses in a cloud of gunsmoke.

The gruesome sequence transitions to a shot of Parker as the Creature, asleep on the tiger skin rug. As Parker opens her eyes, Fonda asks her, “What does all this really mean?” The camera zooms in on Parker and she says with slow, unwavering conviction, “That’s easy, silly…”

⁴⁴ Lee Somers, “Grammatical Mayhem,” *The Washington Post* (November 19, 1956): A20.

⁴⁵ Barbara J. Coleman, “Maidenform(ed): Images of American Women in the 1950s,” *Gender Journal*, 21 (June 1995): 3-11.

⁴⁶ Information provided by the Richard Avedon Foundation.

Just... Spend... Money.” A cacophony of horns and cash registers ring out as the scene fades to black.

Although a fitting end to Avedon’s segment, this is not the last time Parker appears on the special. A half hour after *The Creature*, Parker is featured in an advertorial segment on GE washing machines titled “When the glamorous Suzy Parker brought fashion news to American laundry.” In the ad, Parker gracefully walks down a long set of stairs wrapped in a white linen bed sheet. She is smiling but mute, as a different woman’s voice lists the versatile benefits of GE’s bleach-dispensing washing machine overhead. When Parker reaches the bottom of the stairs, the sheet is lifted from her body through some mechanism of stage magic to reveal that Parker is in fact wearing a men’s shirt. Parker, a gifted actress, is noticeably stiff and unfeeling, particularly in comparison with her electric performance in *The Creature*.

This scene brings up an important question: How did *The Creature*’s subversive humor function within the explicitly commercial context of GE’s special? To some extent, the sketch’s comparative framework worked in GE’s favor, as television was positioned as a more truthful medium compared with print advertising. Writing in response to the program, a viewer from Lakewood, Colorado, stated that the “spoof on advertising seemed evidence that sacred cows may be fewer as television comes of age.”⁴⁷ Another viewer wrote that they “thoroughly enjoyed *The Fabulous Fifties* and felt, for the first time, justified in having purchased a television set. Bring more like that — not necessarily on the same expensive scale, but with freshness and intellectual honesty — and I will watch my television screen more often.”⁴⁸ In his book *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture*, Ethan Thomas argues that by poking fun at

⁴⁷ W.B. Hamilton to CBS, “The Fabulous Fifties,” January 31, 1960, box 110, folder 2, Hayward Papers.

⁴⁸ Lee A. Rubel to CBS “The Fabulous Fifties,” n.d., box 110, folder 2, Hayward Papers.

consumerism, *The Fabulous Fifties* “allowed one to take pleasure in TV, meanwhile signaling one wasn’t totally taken in” by its commercial intent.⁴⁹

The use of self-deprecating humor in *The Creature* seemingly worked to Avedon’s advantage. After the premiere of *The Fabulous Fifties*, Avedon was hired to produce a TV commercial for Dove. Although no copy of the final commercial survives, a photo essay on the ad’s production was published in *Maclean’s* in October 1960 (Figure 27).⁵⁰ According to the article, the ad opens with a shot of a “Vogueish” model with a perfectly made up face. She begins to excessively apply soap, which distorts her makeup in an almost ghoulish fashion. Not unlike *The Creature*, Avedon’s Dove commercial renders stereotypical notions of femininity as monstrous through the destruction of its artifice. Avedon went on to produce several high-profile televised ad campaigns in addition to maintaining his successful print advertising practice up through the 2000s. Avedon’s consistent work in advertising allowed him to seriously pursue fine art in a manner traditionally inaccessible to photographers. As Avedon himself put it in 1975: “My commercial work has made it possible for me to be my own Ford Foundation, my own Guggenheim.”⁵¹

Parker fared less well. Although it was financially empowering, modeling was a demeaning form of labor for Parker. A 1961 profile on Parker printed in *Redbook* aptly describes the degrading banality of a typical shoot:

Six hours were spent another day filming her from above as she turned her head this way and that on a satin pillow, hair blowing, mouth a bit open, eyes at half-mast and shoulders sensuously in motion. The director was very happy; her performance would sell soap...The advertising account executive said: “If we could bottle her, we’d all be rich.” When the crew broke for coffee, Suzy retired to a room at the rear of the studio.... There was a long moment when her eyes clearly expressed what the work cost her in terms of

⁴⁹ Ethan Thompson, *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 5.

⁵⁰ John Gray, “The Anatomy of a Television Commercial,” *Maclean’s* 73, 22 (October 22, 1960): 23-24.

⁵¹ Carol Lawson, “Richard Avedon: An Artist Despite his Success?” *The New York Times* (September 7, 1975): 105

dignity and self-respect. She said to me: “Now you’ve seen it, so don’t ever ask me why I hate being a model!”⁵²

The profile is accompanied by photographs of Parker shot by Avedon, and it goes on to describe their creative relationship in much different terms: “While Suzy disappeared to retouch her face, Avedon set his camera on a tripod. She was ready when he was ready.... Here the mood was not sideshow; there was no challenge to Suzy’s self-respect.” (Figure 28 A)⁵³

In Avedon’s studio, modeling and photography were equivalent forms of expression. However, when rendered through a commercial platform, Parker’s image was no longer her own, credited as the photographer’s creation — or “Creature” — and given new value accessible only to the photographer. In a similar manner, when Avedon created advertising images it was with the understanding that once he handed over the photographs to the agency, they were a product to be used and disposed of in any way the client saw fit. This reality stands in contrast with the way he claimed such fierce ownership over his fine art photography. Avedon’s Creature, in a sense, might embody a feeling of abjection or loss in regards to this lack of control.

Evidence of Avedon’s work in advertising does exist and is increasingly more available with the recent digitization of several major women’s periodicals. Concluding with an anecdote that would have been impossible to obtain without the help of such databases, I’d like to return to the aforementioned *Redbook* interview. Hidden in plain sight, a photograph printed on the bottom right corner of the page pictures Parker with mustache and Dutch collar drawn in sharpie (Figure 28 B). The caption reads: “Always irreverent about herself, Suzy Parker cast a quizzical eye on these pictures that Richard Avedon took for *Redbook* and promptly embellished one with

⁵² Thomas B. Morgan, “The World’s Most Beautiful Woman,” *Redbook* 117, 4 (August 1961): 100.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 101.

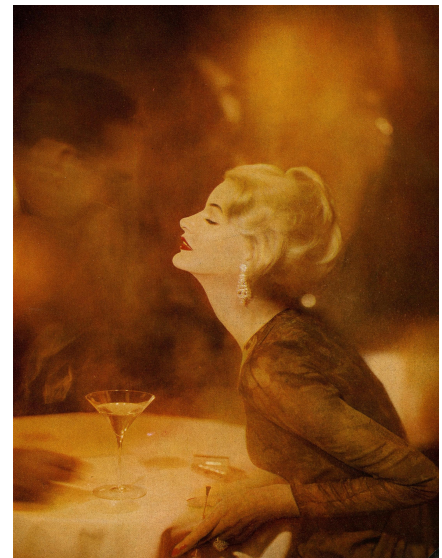
a few strokes of a crayon.”⁵⁴ Parker’s parodic impulse — like Avedon’s in *The Creature* — represents a small but savvy act of resistance within the patriarchal and capitalist structures of her profession.

FIGURE LIST

Figure 1: Advertisement for Revlon’s Fire & Ice, photograph by Richard Avedon. Published in *Vogue*, November 1, 1952, 28-29. Model: Dorian Leigh. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation



Figure 2: An example of Avedon’s use of colored lights for *Harper’s Bazaar*. “The Impressionist Beauty: Nightlights-The Incandescent Beauty,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, October 1957, 143. Model: Sunny Harnett. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation



⁵⁴ Ibid, 39.

Figures 3 A & B: Advertisement for Helena Rubinstein's Jazz lipstick featuring Suzy Parker and Dave Brubeck, photograph by Richard Avedon, 1955. A crop of the same photo was used for Brubeck's album, *Red Hot and Cool*. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation



Figure 4: Still from *Funny Face*, 1957, featuring Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire. Directed by Stanley Donen. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation



Figure 5: Cover of *LIFE* magazine, April 15, 1957

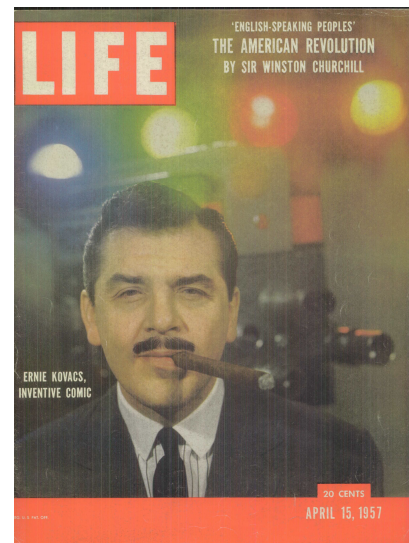


Figure 6: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Henry Fonda with Mannequin designed after Suzy Parker.



Figure 7: Bonwit Teller window display, featuring a mannequins based after Avedon and model Dorian Leigh, May 1957. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation



Figure 8: Still of Henry Fonda from *The Creature* with various covers featuring Suzy Parker.



Figures 9 A, B, C, & D (clockwise from top left): *Vogue*, November 1958, photo by Karen Radkai. *Look Magazine*, August 19, 1958, photo by Richard Avedon. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation. *McCall's*, May 1955, Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation. *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1955, Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation.



Figure 10: Parker as the Creature.



Figure 11: Unpublished photo of Marilyn Monroe for *LIFE* by Avedon, later reprinted in *Observations*, 1959. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation.



Figure 12: Ad for Bliss! Hair Dye, shot by Avedon. Published in *Good Housekeeping*, October 1957, 42-43. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation.

Finally! A home permanent that never needs re-setting!

it's **bliss!**

NEW CONDITIONING CREME WAVE IN A TUBE WITH APPLICATOR TIP!

Unwinds into soft, natural-looking curls right from the curlers! You just brush out and go out!

bliss! Smooths on from easy applicator-tip tube!
Other waves may take a dozen messy steps, but not *bliss!* This fabulous new fragrant creme formula eliminates forever all dab, all drip, all bowls, all bottles! Just wind and rinse, that's all you do... when dry, brush out into glory. It's *bliss!*

bliss! Breaks the oil barrier... curls from inside out!
This wave contains never-before-used penetrants! It gets past the natural oil that resists deep curling, and curls the *heart*, not just the "wall," of each strand! You get a soft, *natural-looking* hair-do the moment you brush out. No more re-setting—it's *bliss!*

bliss! Secretly conditions as it goes!
Your hair is *cared for*—retains a healthy balance of oil and moisture, and even on damp days stays silken-soft and manageable! The only wave especially developed so let you brush out and go out—no more frizz, no more trying to get lasting curls from temporary hair-sprays—day after day it's *bliss!*

Self-remembering! Keep the handy applicator-tip tube, use for next wave, curls out every day!

\$2.00

Just wind and rinse...when dry, brush out—never needs re-setting—it's *bliss!*

PROUDLY PRINTED IN THE U.S.A. BY RICHARD AVEDON

The advertisement features a large photograph of a woman with voluminous, wavy red hair, looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a gold, sequined jacket. In the bottom right corner, there is a box and a tube of the Bliss! Home Permanent hair dye. The box is yellow and red, and the tube is yellow with a red applicator tip.

Figure 13: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Flama Grosso ad.



Figures 14 A & B: Flama Grande ad, *Vogue*, October 15, 1959, 14-15; Flama Grande ad (sans whip) *Seventeen*, November 1959, 6-7.



Figures 15 A & B: Ad for Helena Rubinstein's "Torrero Pink" lipstick, featuring Anne Gunning, photographed by Avedon. The same photograph was reprinted in an ad for Iberia Air. Both ads are featured in the April 1955 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon. Foundation

Helena Rubinstein's

Torrero Pink



New lipstick color for the daring!

Ood! Have! In TORRERO even the new lipstick color that throws all caution to the winds! An exciting shade of pink, it gives the provocative curves of your lips seductive, feminine, lascivious softness... a new and devastating effect!

Helena Rubinstein picked the color right from the bullfight ring. From the Torrero's pink cape, blazing in the sunlight...inting danger... holding all eyes. Yes, TORRERO PINK captures all emotion and excitement.

Only that world-famous beauty expert, Helena Rubinstein, could create a lipstick so vibrant... and so creamy soft as well. A new process, her secret gives this unique lipstick a new color brilliance that never fades, amazingly combined with beauty cream ingredients that smooth but never dry your lips.

Try it! A lipstick for afternoon, you'll find TORRERO PINK beautifully useful. Also harmonizing liquid rouge... now, everywhere. Torrero Pink lipstick, 1.00. Harmonizing Liquid Rouge, 1.00. Prices plus tax.

**TORRERO—the authentic Spanish word for a bullfighter.*



© 1955 Helena Rubinstein, Inc., 635 Fifth Avenue, New York 22.



Harper's Bazaar, April, 1955

FLY TO MAGNIFICENT

Madrid

IN LESS THAN HALF A DAY
NON-STOP FROM NEW YORK IN
IBERIA Super 8 Constellations




11 hours of luxury flight in IBERIA'S Super 8 Constellations and you're in majestic Madrid, sunny southern gateway to all Europe and to all of Spain's finest! First class and tourist service.

From Madrid, frequent IBERIA flights to bustling Barcelona, to Valencia, charming Seville, Malaga, in the tranquil Canary Islands and Majorca, and to other exciting Spanish towns!

For full information, see your travel agent or IBERIA Air Lines of Spain.

Spain observed in vibrant richness... inspiration for Helena Rubinstein's daring new Torrero Pink lipstick color.

Iberia AIR LINES OF SPAIN

339 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK 17, TELEPHONE, MURRAY HILL 9-7390
Or See Your Travel Agent

Figure 16: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Flord Ad.



THERE'S A FLORD ON THE HORIZON

They're sure are starting life together. Don't you just know it will be a happy marriage?

Figure 19: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Schmeerof ad.



Figures 20 A & B: Bert Stern's ads for Smirnoff. From left: *Maclean's*, November 5, 1960, 24; *LIFE* September 22, 1958.



SUDDENLY, EVERYONE'S DRINKING SMIRNOFF VODKA!

No matter where you look nowadays, you're likely to find appreciative people sharing their newest, pleasantest discovery — versatile Smirnoff Vodka. With good vermouth — in your usual proportions — it makes the world's smoothest Martini — driest of the dry. It mixes politely in your favourite soft drink, or with orange or tomato juice . . . never shouts down a delicate flavour. It's smart to serve Smirnoff . . . in more ways than one!

leaves you breathless . . .

Smirnoff VODKA



DRIEST OF THE DRY . . . IT LEAVES YOU BREATHLESS

80 AND 100 PROOF. DISTILLED FROM GRAIN. STE. PIERRE SMIRNOFF FLS. (DIVISION OF HEUBLEIN), HARTFORD, CONN.

Figure 21: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Miss Meingold ad.



Figures 22 A & B: Miss Rheingold 1954, from Rheingold Beer Archive. Six pack featuring contestants for Miss Rheingold 1956, New York Historical Society.



Figure 23: Winston Cigarette ad, *Woman's Day*, May 1956, 134.



Figure 24: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Finster's Cigarette ad.



Figure 25: Maidenform ad with photograph by Richard Avedon, c.1960. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation.



Figure 26: Still from *The Creature*, featuring Ladenform ad.



Figure 27: Behind-the-scenes look at Avedon's TV commercial for Dove. "The Anatomy of a Television Commercial," *Maclean's* (October 22, 1960), 23-24.



Figures 28 A & B: Avedon's photos for "The World's Most Beautiful Woman," *Redbook* (August 1961), 38. Courtesy and © of The Richard Avedon Foundation



Among photographers, artists and designers, Suzy Parker is known as **THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN** as well as the best-paid model in history. She has freedom, glamour and success. Yet she says of herself, 'I'm everything I don't like in other women'

BY THOMAS B. BORGAN • Suzy Parker, age 28, earns \$120 an hour by standing, sitting, lying, curling or cowering before a camera. She commands this rate (double the rate for the next-best model) for the simple reason that her face in an advertisement usually sells more products than an ad with another girl's face. Joan Crawford once referred to Suzy Parker's face as the "most fabulously beautiful thing" she had ever seen. The late Christian Dior came out badly for Suzy Parker as the "most beautiful woman in the world." Many Americans, unaware of the name behind the well-liked perfect ordering of auburn-red hair, grey eyes, high cheekbones, freckled nose and imp's mouth, nevertheless respond to the face year after year by buying more shampoo, more hair, more clothes or more magazines. This enables Suzy Parker to make \$100,000 a year when she chooses to be modeling a little more than two eight-hour days per week.

Suzy has a healthy respect for her earning powers and a healthy contempt for her profession. (Continued on page 100) Always irreverent about herself, Suzy Parker cast a quizzical eye on these pictures that Richard Avedon took for Redbook and promptly embellished one with a few swift strokes of a crayon.

Suzy has a healthy respect for her earning powers and a healthy contempt for her profession. (Continued on page 100)

Always irreverent about herself, Suzy Parker cast a quizzical eye on these pictures that Richard Avedon took for Redbook and promptly embellished one with a few swift strokes of a crayon.



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