

Barefaced: Ageing women stars, 'No Make-Up' photography, and authentic selfhood in the 2017 Pirelli Calendar

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As celebrity culture continues to navigate ever more complex waters in search of signifiers of authenticity, for women celebrities a willingness to share photographs of themselves make-up free has become a hazy marker of a certain 'barefaced' daring, in which they appear to come closer to imparting their 'real self'. As Richard Dyer argued in his landmark analysis of stardom, *Heavenly Bodies*, sincerity and authenticity sit alongside one another as 'qualities greatly prized in stars because they guarantee, respectively, that the star really means what he or she says, and that the star really is what she or he appears to be' (1986: 11). At one level, make-up free images, often shared on Instagram and other social media by the stars, suggest a willingness on their part to momentarily abandon or expose 'the celebrity machine' (Redmond 2008; 13ⁱ), to refuse to play the glamour game, and to instead show audiences and fans what they are 'really' like in an act of (at least seeming) camaraderie with them. In practice, these images are of course still heavily mediated, often contested, and have become part of the celebrity machine itself; indeed I argue here that, for all the staging of candour and spontaneity they can enact, they are increasingly even an *expected* component of women's celebrity performance. Throughout the fields of acting, modelling, presenting, and all kinds of similarly public-facing performance-based careers, women subjects know on entering these professional spaces that, from on-set publicity pics to public photo-calls, recitals of camera-ready spectacle and a willingness to participate in the labour entailed in these exchanges are likely at some time or other to be fundamental to their promotional prospects and advancement. Indeed, writing in 1957 in one of the founding analyses of star studies, Edgar Morin observed in *The Stars* both that for women actors, 'beauty', stardom and make-up are indissolubly entwined, and that make-up constitutes an indispensable armament in staving off ageing and preserving the perception of youthfulness. In his words, 'The makeup of stars is essentially a beauty makeup... movie makeup... restores youth and freshness, repairs the complexion, smooths away wrinkles, compensates for imperfections, and orders the features according to a canon of beauty... The made up beauty of the star imposes a unifying personality upon her life and her roles' (Morin, 1957: 43-44). Tellingly, 'the star' is gendered in this summation specifically as female; further, Morin's account points to the seamless cultural conflation of *youthfulness* with women's beauty. What happens to women's star status or signification, then, when they forego the comfortingly illusionary and perfecting properties of cosmetics for 'make-up free' photography? And how are the stakes entailed

in such photography more challengingly laden, more hazardous, but also more potentially gratifying, for *ageing* women stars?

In this article I interrogate the burgeoning prevalence of make-up free campaigns in celebrity and popular culture in recent years, and the myriad ways in which this movement speaks in particular to the contradictory pressures and punishing scrutiny exacted on women ageing in the public eye. Since Dyer's early work on the construction and circulation of stardom as noted (1986) through to work decades later on reality TV (eg Hill, 2005; Deller, 2016) and internet celebrity (eg Deller & Murphy, 2019), star and celebrity studies have continually returned to the centrality of '*authenticity*' in understanding the complexities of audience-star relationshipsⁱⁱ. Within this bonding process, as Dyer so memorably explored, the public enduringly seek to grasp what the star is 'really' like outside of their performances and the machinery of stardom, sustaining a pleasurable but ultimately inscrutable dynamic in which audiences desire to know but can never satisfactorily ascertain the star's 'true self'. Adjacent to this field, make-up holds a contradictory relationship to popular notions of authenticity; while wearing make-up is perpetually positioned as a kind of counterfeiting veneer with which to enhance or alter one's 'true' looks, ethnographic research among US women who wear make-up has found by contrast that they commonly use it to generate 'an "*authentic sense of self*"' (McCabe et al, 2017: 3) (my emphasis). Maryann McCabe et al found following interviews with women 'selected across an age-range (25-49 years old), from different ethnic backgrounds (Caucasian, Latino, and African American)' and life stages (ibid: 8), and conducted across urban and suburban locations, that women's own embodied experience of using make-up enabled the external expression of internal orientation (ibid: 15). For their respondents, crucially, 'makeup rituals afford moments of heightened awareness and confidence building when women transform into more authentic selves by connecting inner worth to physical appearance' (ibid: 15).

The trend for make-up free photography particularly since the mid-2010s, then, crystallises some of the contentious and evocative meanings make-up possesses for women who wear cosmetics (and it is important to remain cognisant that not all women do), particularly women in the public eye under heightened pressure to always be 'camera-ready'. More broadly it is a reminder of the enduringly fractious status held by make-up within feminist debate, where it is positioned by some as a fundamental constituent of women's subordination within Western patriarchy, and by others to comprise a precious, (largely) woman-identified space within which to express and explore one's feminine self/ves. Indeed, it is instructive here to reflect on the richly multivalent usages of the term

'make-up', which might variously include, for example, to compensate for; to falsify; or to *create*ⁱⁱⁱ. Recently, the use/non-use/'over'-use of make-up has been a key theme within analyses of postfeminist discourse (eg Lazar, 2011). But it has long been a plainly divisive issue with regard to questions of women's agency and emancipation (see for example Dyhouse, 2011), its rejection being most typically framed as central to the resolutions and conflicts of 2nd wave activism (though the debates very much precede even this) (see Brownmiller, 1984: 158-60). Angela McRobbie provides an evocative reflection on this period, when she remarks, 'I myself recall my own fury as a young woman at the anti-make up and anti-fashion stance of the radical feminist of the early 1980s: indeed such a stance encouraged myself and others to go to further extremes of flaunting the love of fashion, make-up, etc' (McRobbie, 2011: xii). The bind endures decades on, such that following their cooperative inquiry study with feminist identified women who also engaged in normative beauty practices, Sarah CE Riley and Christina Scharff adopted the phrase 'the dilemma of beauty' to describe the continued unease participants felt about their simultaneous claims to be both 'feminist' and 'feminine' (2012: 213). Make-up lies at the heart of the Western landscape of beauty-based consumerism where, as Ann J Cahill has put it:

A source of both intense anxiety and deep pleasure for women, feminine beautification raises issues concerning coercion, internalisation of misogynist values and beliefs, and aesthetic creativity... The emphasis on feminine beauty is a controlling force in women's lives, and the fact that some individual women claim to be choosing aspects of beautification independently does not necessarily contradict its role in perpetuating sexual inequality (Cahill, 2003: 42-3).

The analysis of stardom and make-up free photography undertaken here looks most particularly at the 2017 Pirelli calendar as a preeminent example of the contentious cultural currency consequently at stake in the circulation of such star-imagery. Constructing a brief critical timeline of the escalation of the make-up free movement across popular culture in recent years; incorporating extant research drawn from cultural and celebrity studies, feminist media studies, cultural gerontology and consumer culture studies; undertaking textual analysis of the 2017 Pirelli calendar and critical discourse analysis of its promotion and media reception, this work brings expansive interdisciplinary scholarship to bear with a breadth of allied cultural artefacts. Through the multi-faceted approach adopted herein, it forges new insights into both the polemical meanings of the repudiation of make-up in contemporary visual culture, and the import of make-up for conceptualising the nexus of ageing, gender and stardom.

Crucially, in 2017, the high-end Italian based tyre manufacturer's much anticipated, highly exclusive annual promotional artefact trademarked familiarly as 'The Cal', which has for five decades captured the preeminent women models of its era in often highly sexualised and salacious images with 'art' pretensions, was (at least seemingly) shot for the first time with make-up free subjects. While this creative decision was widely greeted as momentous by the media, it assuredly did not occur in a cultural vacuum. Hence before looking more closely at the promotion and reception of the calendar that year, in order to more fully contextualise the cultural landscape that impelled the 2017 edition I want first to chronicle the rise of the no make-up movement on social media in the period just preceding its release. The movement emerged and gained momentum particularly at this time as a crusade of sorts (albeit one that has prompted a good degree of dissent, as I will demonstrate) among both celebrities and ordinary public users of social media, formulated as a 'pushback' against a long-standing deleterious culture of physical perfectionism exacted on women. Unravelling the discourses of social resistance and defiance often adopted to frame women's actions in such photography, I examine the disingenuousness of positioning the no make-up movement in this way as a kind of 'leveller'; while the movement is repeatedly situated as one in which *all women* regardless of the specificity of their customary appearance might defiantly (or for that matter apprehensively) show themselves in solidarity stripped down, it is far from equitable in practice. Rather, the ways in which one's participation in this movement is shaped and received are subject to numerous riders concerning technical know-how, class, health, wealth and well-being, and evaluated according to tightly regulated, enduringly Western-dominated benchmarks regarding what constitutes 'beauty'.

Furthermore, crucially this is a movement inescapably tied up too in the *regulation of ageing*. For as Anne Jerslev has argued in her analysis of the upscale fashion-house Céline's 2016 advertising campaign featuring revered octogenarian writer Joan Didion, 'The answer to the question, 'When is the face not beautiful anymore, when does it lose its value?' is: it loses its value when the process of ageing cannot be concealed by any means anymore' (2018: 353). For older women celebrities, then, the stakes entailed in make-up free photography are both higher than and of a different nature to that of their younger counterparts; the images will be scrutinised to ascertain not just what they 'really' look like, but how 'well' they have aged, in an industry that shows no mercy to women perceived to be 'ageing badly' (Jermyn & Holmes, 2016). At the same time, I want to examine here how such photography may at one level be employed to work in these women's favour, in that it can also be marshalled to signal a certain *gravitas*. Such images have become indicative of an

emboldened ageing woman subject, one who no longer invests in or pursues (if she ever did) the 'superficial' domain of appearances and cosmetics with the concern she might have in her youth. For ageing women actors, a willingness to show herself 'barefaced', then, brings with it not only an invitation to scrutinise the evidence of her succeeding or failing as a 'graceful ager' (Dolan and Tincknell, 2012: xi). It conveys with it also the promise of newly augmented cachet, as she takes a symbolic stand against an order where women are told their professional lifespan is in no small way contingent on secreting and expunging the signs of ageing that barefaced photography will surely reveal. To what extent, then, might the ageing women actors featured in the 2017 Pirelli calendar have been able to utilise the make-up free movement to bolster their star image, rather than only sully or jeopardising it?

'A document of its time': From 'girlie' pin-ups to 'a different beauty'

The analysis made here builds in part on previous work undertaken on the 44th annual Pirelli calendar by Anne Jerslev and myself (2017). As we noted there, Pirelli has become one of Europe's largest tyre manufacturers since being founded in Milan in 1872, enduringly recognised primarily as a supplier to the luxurious and high-octane sport of Formula One (F1) racing (Jermyn & Jerslev, 2017: 224). According to the company's official history, the calendar was successfully introduced in 1964 (following a lacklustre launch in 1963), when the brand was looking for a novel marketing strategy with which to stand out from their competitors (www.pirelli.com). Their intention was to 'class up' the format of 'girlie' calendars filled with partially-clad young women that were then popular among car mechanics and manufacturers (Gilbert, 2016). Pirelli's high-end corporate freebie soon matured into an eagerly anticipated, limited edition, annual cultural artefact, becoming known for its risqué, provocative pictures shot by revered photographers such as Herb Ritts and Bruce Weber. Creatives were given free rein to 'break new artistic ground' (Gilbert, 2016), but this progressively became synonymous with using The Cal as a forum to test the distinction between high-art and soft-porn. Distributed to only 20,000 of the company's most esteemed clientele and 'members of the fashion elite' (La Ferla, 2016), Pirelli increasingly positioned The Cal as a bold, agenda-setting interventionist in the (post-) 1960s sexual revolution, at the cutting edge of shifting debates around women, sexuality and empowerment as well as art and commerce. Its purpose for Pirelli, then, has been threefold: to flatter and target their most exclusive customers; secondly, to generate valuable publicity (while production costs for each Pirelli calendar have been estimated at around \$2million, they generate an estimated \$300-\$350m in free advertising (Gilbert, 2016)); and, thirdly and fundamentally, to nurture their brand identity. As Ruth La Ferla has observed in the *New York Times*,

Pirelli's 'vaulting ambition' in The Cal has been 'to create, if not precisely an art object, at least, a document of its time' (La Ferla, 2016).

However, in more recent years its diminishing reputation had become more tawdry than edgy, more irksomely predictable than provocative, as its succession of scantily attired supermodels became an increasingly jaded concept. Hence in 2016 Pirelli made what was perceived as a bold move to refocus the brand's once trailblazing aspirations when Annie Leibovitz, shooting the calendar for the second time and to the enthrallment of a curious media, eschewed models to instead 'feature women chosen for their accomplishments rather than their physical appearance' (Gilbert, 2016); the great majority of them fully clothed, a number of them aged 60+, and including such diverse figures as athlete Serena Williams, author Fran Lebowitz and philanthropist Agnes Gund. The following year, on his third commission for The Cal, esteemed German fashion photographer Peter Lindbergh pushed this reimagining of the Pirelli calendar further still, shooting 14 prominent women actors (along with Russian professor Anastasia Ignatova), conspicuously ranging in age from 28 to 71 for the new edition comprised of 40 images and named 'Emotional'^{iv}. The 'models' included Helen Mirren (71); Julianne Moore (55), Nicole Kidman (49), Robin Wright (50), Charlotte Rampling (70), Kate Winslet (40) and Uma Thurman (46), as well as younger stars such as Lupita Nyong'o (33) and Alicia Vikander (28). In our previous research on this edition of the calendar, Jerslev and I examined the ramifications of Pirelli's shift to photographing subjects who were, firstly, actors rather than models; secondly, clothed rather than un- or semi-clothed and; thirdly, and most importantly for our purposes, in numerous instances older subjects (Jermyn & Jerslev, 2017). What we did not have space to consider within the constraints of that discussion, however, was the significance of capturing subjects unretouched and '*make-up free*'. Hence, this article takes up the analysis where that earlier work abated, interrogating how questions of art and celebrity, ageing and gender, exploitation and resistance, intersect in the images of the '*make-up free*' ageing women stars featured there in expressive and telling ways, in a manner that speaks volumes about the gendered experience of ageing in the public domain.

Close to you: intimacy, authenticity and make-up free photography

My intention in first examining the wider eruption of the no make-up movement particularly across social media in the period leading up to The Cal's 2017 launch is not to critically interrogate how the attributes of social media lent themselves to such a turn in visual culture, a project which lies beyond

the scope of this article. Rather it is to recognise here what can be seen as a series of key episodes paving a path towards the viability of the concept of 'Emotional' for Pirelli at that time. Each of these stories became media moments and cultural talking points of their own, while all of them collectively augmented a growing drive to encourage women to embrace their make-up free self. This was very much in line with the wider growth of 'Body Positive' movements^v, while also importantly constituting a kind of 'counter-culture' to the boom of YouTube make-up tutorials and the 'contouring' trend bolstered by Instagram across much the same period. I start this 'timeline' in December 2013, with the release of Beyoncé's 'Flawless', and it is important to note here that while the large majority of Lindbergh's sitters were white, the wider no make-up movement is one in which women of colour have been visible participants. Containing the line 'I woke up like this', Flawless led to a hashtag, selfie trend and rash of memes by the same name, before on January 29 2014 Beyoncé joined in and posted an Instagram pic of herself apparently having 'woken up like this', lying partially obscured but seemingly make-up free in bed, with a squinting smile. Then in March 2014, veteran actor Kim Novak was heavily criticised in the media following her appearance at the March 2nd Academy Awards, for what was deemed to be her excessive cosmetic surgery. In solidarity with Novak on March 5th the novelist Laura Lippman posted a picture of herself on Facebook without make-up using the hashtag #itsokkimnovak, and thousands followed suit. Enterprising fundraisers saw an opportunity, and the trend morphed into the #nomakeupselfie; a hashtag encouraging women to post make-up free pictures online, while donating to Cancer Research UK, raising £8m in six days. Two years on from Beyoncé's 'I woke up like this' Instagram post, in January 2015 singer Demi Lovato posted a make-up free pic of herself encouraging her then 29m followers to adopt the hashtag #NoMakeupMonday. While framed as prompted by the desire to popularise a discourse of 'feeling good' about oneself without recourse to make-up, the commercial promotional opportunities contained in such posts for Lovato and others cannot be overlooked – it is not incidental that she launched her own skincare line, called 'Devonne by Demi', in December 2014.

By Dec 2015 the #nomakeup hashtag had been used more than 10million times by Instagrammers, and other stars continued to follow the trend; in February 2016, for example, former supermodel Cindy Crawford posted a make-up free selfie 'in honor of her 50th birthday'. But a defining moment for the no make-up movement came on May 31st 2016, when award-winning singer, producer and activist Alicia Keys published an article in Lena Dunham's (now defunct) online *Lenny* newsletter detailing her decision to ditch wearing make-up. Here she detailed a life's journey through make-up

from girl to woman and eventually public figure - her burgeoning exhaustion with 'the constant judgement of women... every time I left the house, I would be worried if I didn't put on makeup' - until the epiphanic moment when the photographer for her latest album asked to photograph her make-up free, just as she was, when she arrived for the shoot straight from the gym. 'Empowered', as she put it, by the photos of 'this real and raw me' she resolved therein to abandon make-up; "cause I don't want to cover up anymore. Not my face, not my mind, not my soul' she ends her article, in a sentiment which again equates make-up with the somehow *inauthentic* (Keys, 2016). In June that year Keys notably attended the BET awards red carpet without make-up, later that summer appearing without it too as a judge on season 11 of TV music competition *The Voice* (NBC, 2011-). As 2016 continued other stars pitched in, with Kim Kardashian attending a Paris fashion week event in October also 'make-up free'. This was met by more than a little scepticism by some, who bristled at Kardashian for crystallising the disingenuousness of privileged women claiming an evidently still carefully ameliorated look as 'natural' (perhaps particularly given her prominence in the aforementioned contouring make-up trend). In sum, this series of incidents in quite rapid succession, in some instances featuring some of the period's most visible and preeminent women stars drawn from quite some diversity of age, race and star-status, provides an edifying context within which to better understand just how primed the discursive environment was for the 2017 Pirelli calendar - which tellingly was shot during precisely this latter period, between May and June 2016.

For audiences following these stories, or replicating these hashtags and trends having seen them promoted by celebrities, in all these instances of women stars foregoing make-up one can identify a fascination with '*getting close*', and indeed the history of celebrity studies has been preoccupied with conceptualising the operation of this desire. More recently, the critical terrain of selfies studies has generated a huge volume of work, the scope of which again lies beyond this article. But pertinently here, for Anne Jerslev and Mette Mortensen the phenomena of the *celebrity selfie* must be approached on 'three distinct levels'; firstly, within the context of the ongoing project of 'celebrification' (2016: 250); secondly, as a key contemporary means of nurturing and maintaining phatic communication and connection with fans; and thirdly, in producing the performative construction of the self (2016: 254). In this sense, with particular regard to its phatic function, in an age of social media celebrity selfies have become a key means to 'maintain connected presence' (Jerslev and Mortensen, 2016: 253) in which the 'direct' access they seemingly give to the celebrity's

sometimes random, unplanned, unfolding, everyday exchanges produces a gratifying sense of achieving *closeness* to the celebrity.

Intriguingly, all this bears marked conceptual parallels with how Lindbergh has spoken about the concept and styling of 'Emotional', where he seemingly elected to photograph at least some of his subjects without recourse to make-up artists, and to publish them un-retouched, as part of a professed aim to '[get] *as close as possible* to them to take my photos' (cited in Pirelli, 2016, my emphasis). As noted, dispensing with tradition (and as Liebovitz had largely done in 2016) all of Lindbergh's 2017 models were clothed. And yet, in promoting the 2017 Cal he describes in the Pirelli press release how his intention was, 'To create a calendar not around perfect bodies but on sensitivity and emotion, stripping down to the very soul of the sitters, who *thus become more nude than naked*' (Pirelli, 2016a) (my emphasis). To forego make-up it seems, then, as a model, and as an ageing woman star in particular, is to render one-self 'nude'. Lindbergh's language here is arresting, dovetailing with a distinction long tussled with in aesthetic debates through art history about the different evaluative connotations inferred in the use of 'naked' as opposed to 'nude'. There is a kind of pre-emptive strike here against any notion that the styling of his sitters is exploitative or vulgar (as with the 'naked' subjects in The Cal of old), as he instead harnesses the poise, taste, and again artistic *gravitas*, suggested alternatively by 'nude'. Thus, crucially, in the quest for authenticity the removal of make-up, like the (apparent or suggested) absence of professional photographers and stylists in celebrity selfies on social media, entails the removal of a barrier that has previously prohibited a higher degree of intimacy with and closeness to the star.

Calendar Girls: Picturing 'Emotional'

Among the most widely reproduced of Lindbergh's images were those focusing on Moore, Thurman, Kidman and Wright.^{vi} Moore, wearing a simple but still relatively revealing black leotard with spaghetti straps, sits astride a stool, her right leg drawn up to her chest, elbow resting on her knee, her right hand drawn to her forehead in a pose suggesting thoughtfulness. Though her face is sombre, even sullen, a hint of alluring old-school photographic styling creeps in via a 'wind-machine' effect, as strands of her long loose hair waft gently over her face, and her posture is such that the clean, athletic lines of her lean arms and legs are emphasised. Thurman by contrast is captured looking serenely and intently into the camera in an extreme close-up which crops her face from mouth to forehead. And while again the image is softened by the wisps of loose hair blowing about

her face, there is no denying the discernibility of her ‘crows-feet’ in the sprinkling of lines visible around the corners of her eyes. Kidman, like Moore has her leg drawn up to her chest but is captured in close-up, her chin resting almost coquettishly on her knee, her hair pulled messily back into an untidy bun. Like Thurman, her facial expression has certain echoes of the Mona Lisa about it, suggesting the slightest hint of a smile, with a direct gaze out at the viewer. As a star who was at one time widely censured by the media for her ‘frozen’ countenance following repeated Botox usage, what may be most striking about this image for those familiar with Kidman’s career is the conspicuousness of the lines across her forehead. Wright is the only sitter in this series to look away from the camera, captured in a full body shot. She sits, legs crossing, on the end of a battered wooden table, head bowed, looking down, gripping the edges. And though one can observe a certain looseness of the flesh around the neck and décolletage that comes with ageing, one is struck too, as with Moore, by how her taut pose accentuates the litheness of her long limbs. The photos share a sense of stillness, composure; the subjects each ‘radiating poise, confidence and peace with themselves’, as one commentator put it (Gilbert, 2016).

Promoting the calendar for the Pirelli press release, Lindbergh recounts some admirable intentions:

In a time when women are represented in the media and everywhere else as ambassadors of perfection and youth, I thought it was important to remind everyone that there is a different beauty, more real and truthful and not manipulated by commercial or any other interests, a beauty which speaks about individuality, courage to be yourself and your own private sensibility’ (in Pirelli, 2016a; see also Hou, 2016).

Here we see the familiar desire, as outlined above, to locate the star’s authentic self (a quest for the ‘real and truthful’, a rejection of the manipulative and the commercial). In Pirelli’s promotional film about the making of the calendar (2016b) all Lindbergh’s subjects are effervescent in their admiration for him; ‘I said yes like that’, reveals Mirren of her invitation to take part, snapping her fingers for emphasis. Still, in a *Hollywood Reporter* feature readers learn that ‘the actresses agreed it was intimidating – Mirren called in downright “dangerous” – to be shot without digital trickery’ (Richford, 2016). Lindbergh relates that he ‘approached the job as a spontaneous, largely improvised adventure...“There was no urging them to smile, no promising, “You’re going to look great.”’ (La Ferla 2016). This chimes with Kidman’s account of the shoot, where she ‘said she thought they were doing test shots of her in her T-shirt, before she realized that this was the final cut’ (Richford, 2016); and of Mirren’s recollections in the Pirelli press conference where she praised the ‘organic’ process of working with Lindbergh but told still of being surprised that the shoot had commenced before she’d apprehended this: ‘It happens without you even kind of realising that actually you’re doing it.

You think that you're just kind of doing a few test shots, but no, you're actually doing the shot' (Associated Press, 2016).

Furthermore, Mirren 'said she had come to the set fully made up before Lindbergh asked her to take it off' (Richford, 2016), suggesting she was not made aware in advance of plans to make the shoot make-up free. Meanwhile, Julianne Moore also recounts how she was seemingly caught unawares: 'I walk in, with no make-up on and with wet hair and puffy eyes from waking up. And he [Lindbergh] said, 'No, no, no, you are perfect'', before commencing the shoot (Pirelli, 2016b; see also Hou, 2016). All of this speaks to Lindbergh's confessed desire to 'get as close as possible', to reach the 'real' subject via stealth tactics, and capture them before they can switch into fully performative mode; an 'authentic self' which is grasped at also in the inducement to forego make-up. It would be presumptuous to suggest the women subjects gave away their agency in these photo-sessions. Yet these testimonies suggest too something disarming at work in the process, giving a lie to the idea that such photoshoots - which are absolutely borne of a commercial imperative - can ever be devoid of 'manipulation' in the way Lindbergh asserts.

Behind the masquerade: Historicising the nexus of make-up, gender and stardom

But it is important to note that the 2017 Pirelli calendar, and the timeline of the no make-up movement before it on social media traced above, have themselves other important potent cultural precursors. On social media and beyond, the sharing of make-up free selfies has been variously received as 'brave', attention-seeking, self-congratulatory, deceitful, or simply overblown (Deller and Tilton, 2015), and the whole question of 'authenticity' on Instagram is typically framed as reductive. But crucially in other forums and media, allowing oneself as a woman actor to be captured make-up free, or to be regarded as a woman actor who cares little for make-up, have enduringly been seen as markers of talent, commitment to true artistry and 'the work', rather than to the vulgarity and superficiality of fame. One can think of Meryl Streep as exemplary here, being both a woman actor who is held in unparalleled esteem and one who has long been known and admired for her minimalist cosmetics usage; indeed, encapsulating the widespread respect that comes with this repute, leading young women's online popculture magazine *bustle.com* dedicated a whole feature to Streep following the 2017 Golden Globes for making 'understated makeup' not just 'some trendy thing she's trying out this year [but] basically a way of life' (Weiner, 2017).

Beyond such individual instances, however, underlining the import of the nexus which links the disavowal of make-up to gravitas among women actors, I would point here also to how the cinematic motif which most evocatively signals an ageing woman star to be lionised for her 'serious' acting clout is the emotionally loaded sequence in which she allows herself to be filmed, captured in a meditative moment, often in front of a mirror, while removing or discarding her make-up. From Bette Davis as ageing theatrical-star Margo Channing in *All About Eve* (1950); to Glenn Close as the once glittering Marquise de Merteuil rendered a social pariah in the final scenes of *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), fixedly wiping off her make-up in the knowledge that she is ruined; to Susan Sarandon on the run in the desert in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) symbolically casting off the final cosmetic accoutrements of stifling femininity when she tosses her lipstick from her car, these are instants of spectacular exhibition, and it is no coincidence that all the lauded performances noted above resulted in Oscar nominations. More recently on TV, arguably the most acclaimed moment in Viola Davis's Emmy award-winning performance as Annalise Keating in *How To Get Away With Murder* (ABC 2014 -) came when, in a process of performative disassembling, she prepares to confront her indiscreetly philandering husband by carefully stripping off her wig and false eyelashes before resolutely wiping away her make-up.^{vii} In such instances, the older or ageing woman star seems momentarily suspended on-screen in a contemplative, arresting rendering not only of the uncovering of 'womanliness as a masquerade' (Riviere, 1929), but of the 'temporal vertigo' that Lynne Segal has spoken of as symptomatic of the ageing process. In this evocative phrase, Segal conceptualises the experience of feeling one's ageing self to be 'psychically, in one sense, all ages and no age' (2013: 4); in parallel to this, in these emblematic sequences the woman star momentarily seems to inhabit memories and projections of who she is, has been, and will be, while the audience watches her undo some of the cosmetic trappings that have allowed her to inhabit a star image. Conversely, ageing women stars judged to be clinging to (the no longer effectively transformative properties of) excessive make-up in later life are regarded as delusional, desperate, ham-fisted, as so amply illustrated by popular conceptions of the later-life Joan Crawford, cleaving pitifully to the now inappropriately dramatically enhanced eyebrows and lipstick of her youth^{viii}. More recently, Katherine Farrimond has examined the media backlash against burlesque star Dita Von Teese for continuing into her 40s to adopt the same heavy, vintage-styled make-up that brought her admiration in her earlier career, since it is now perceived to be unflatteringly ageing on a woman of her advancing years (Farrimond, 2019).

Intriguingly, there are enriching parallels to be drawn here between the older make-up free woman star and Anne Morey's work on 'grotesquerie as marker of success' for ageing women actors (2011). Her analysis challenges the popular idea that casting ageing women stars in repellent 'crone roles' in their later careers exists primarily as evidence of 'a chauvinistic sense on the part of sexist producers that the aging female actress should be grateful even for roles that emphasize her physical and psychic deterioration' (2011: 106-7). Rather, for Morey 'grotesquerie' is 'an important mechanism by which female performers move in public perception from a conception of female celebrity *that focuses on their appearance to one that focuses on their abilities*' (2011: 104) (my emphasis). While tellingly she again invokes Streep as an illustrative figure, the most evocatively exemplary instances of this phenomenon are actors appearing in what Morey calls 'the elegiac grotesque' (2011: 108); namely those ageing Hollywood women stars who *played* ageing women stars in metafilms of the early post-classical period, such as Bette Davis in *All About Eve*, already invoked above, and Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Morey asserts that performing these roles brought 'professional and even personal power' to these ageing women (2011: 104), as well as agentic intervention into exposing the mechanisms of ageing female stardom. Similarly the older women actors pointed to here assenting to being captured make-up free can be analogously understood as consciously embracing a tradition through which they appeal to be understood as serious and skilful artists. This is a very different realm of photography to that of 'paparazzi' shots which furtively capture women stars out and about in their everyday lives, un-made up, and without their consent, in what is typically disingenuously framed as a harmless bid to show them 'as they really are'. Rather, the rise of make-up free photography examined in the different forums noted here in one sense ostensibly takes power back from paparazzi and the 'shaming' function of such pictures, while underlining too how it has become an increasingly common *expectation* of female celebrity, even a rite of passage, which might ease the transition into hoped-for later-life professional gravitas.

Arguably, such artistic weightiness rubs off on the actors captured by Lindbergh in 'Emotional' not just in the text itself via its series of 'serious', candid poses where the subject recurrently looks ambivalently directly into the camera, 'shot in analog... and in natural lighting' (Richford, 2016), and employing a starkly arresting monochrome palette. Gravitas is bestowed subsequently too, in the often solemn discussion of the significance of the 2017 *The Cal* that met its release. Through their participation, its older women subjects were given a platform that positioned or bolstered her place at the visible forefront of debates about gender, ageing and culture in the media; Thurman, then, takes to the stage at the press launch to speak earnestly about how she wants her children 'to see their mother ageing, and being herself, and not being uncomfortable with that' (Pirelli, 2016b). Such

a platform is particularly imperative for actors like Kidman and Thurman who have been widely scrutinised and rebuked in the media for having ‘bad’ (which is to say ‘obvious’) invasive cosmetic procedures, ones which alarmingly, and seemingly self-defeatingly too, inhibit their capacity for facial expressiveness as actors. In *The Cal* they are instead placed alongside other respected older or ageing stars like Rampling and Winslet who have (as far as is generally agreed by commentators) eschewed such interventions, and who in the case of Mirren and Winslet have previously been lauded for taking a public stand against airbrushing as models for the L’Oreal group (see, for example, Del Russo, 2015).

Still, the #nomakeup movement has been vocally critiqued in many quarters, not least for merely replacing one beauty standard with a nigh on identical one, and sustaining an equally tyrannical regime in which the estimation of women continues to be quantified in visual terms. In all instances the regular signifiers of Western female beauty – including clear, glowing skin, invisible pores, well-proportioned features and bone structure, expressive eyes ideally with long lashes, no evidence of hirsutism, full lips, straight white teeth and so on – are still exactly what are coveted and admired. Furthermore, Alicia Keys’ #nomakeup look has been called out as bogus, or at least ‘not quite as real as it seems’, as a *Guardian* headline put it, after Keys’ makeup artist revealed in an interview with *W* magazine that ‘Keys wears brow definer, self-tanning anti-ageing serum and mattifier that total more than £300’, such that she was soon accused (as were Beyoncé and others before her) of ‘tapping into the humblebrag movement of the moment’ (Elan, 2016). Similarly, there is something of a question mark as to just how liberally ‘make-up free’ might have been interpreted by those working on Pirelli’s ‘Emotional’, and by the journalists subsequently reporting it, as threads of inconsistency or misrepresentation, even shamming, filter through the media coverage. While reports like those in *The Hollywood Reporter* were intent on emphasising the novelty and importance of the fact that the calendar eschewed digital technologies and was shot ‘without makeup and in natural lighting’ (Richford, 2016), elsewhere, in interview with the *New York Times* Lindbergh comments that on taking the project he pondered, ‘My thought was, “Why don’t we do a calendar with women ready to go *without much makeup*, to be as they are?”’ (La Ferla, 2016) (my emphasis); while *The Atlantic* observes the photos are ‘unretouched’ but also how, ‘He captured them *wearing minimal hair and make-up*, in an artistic decision he described as “a cry against the terror of perfection and youth”’ (Gilbert, 2016) (my emphasis). In the Pirelli ‘Making-of’ documentary about the calendar (Pirelli, 2016b) Lindbergh again clarifies his understanding of ‘nudity’ as exposing the authentic self; ‘What is another kind of naked, much more important than naked body parts? I think it’s when you really show yourself the way you are’. Yet while this has

been widely framed in media coverage as meaning the subjects were shot make-up free, the Pirelli documentary itself opens with a montage of the crew on set revealing make-up artists and hair stylists at work in some of the (not quite identifiable) shoots, while it also displays the attention paid to professional lighting set-ups (Pirelli, 2016b).

To present the 2017 Cal as in any sense uniformly 'make-up free' is thus misleading, and the grey areas described here underline the ways in which celebrity 'barefaced' moments, seemingly impromptu or otherwise, are of course open to manipulation, subjectively understood, and predicated on access to all kinds of treatments, technological tampering, 'trickery' and expense accounts. Beyond costly mattifiers, this may also include, for example, the artifice and cosmetic benefits of fillers, microblading, eyelash infills and perming, lip shaping treatments, semi-permanent eyeliner and so on, all of which lie in a contestable place on the beauty treatment spectrum in terms of being considered 'make-up'. Thus these contexts utterly belie any beguiling notion of a superficial 'level playing field' which social media inducements to women to unite and strip away their make-up might make dubious claim to.

Let's make-up?: cultural gerontological approaches to 'Emotional'

It would be unproductive, finally, to try to ascertain conclusively if anything at all other than profitable publicity motivated the Pirelli campaign to feature older women make-up free. Was it, as Vanessa Friedman wondered in *The New York Times* of Leibovitz's 2016 Cal, 'an example of calculated exploitation of a social trend, a clever attempt to profit from the spirit of the age, or a more permanent commitment to change?' (2015). Indeed, rather than being driven by burgeoning socio-ethical awareness the shifts in the sensibility of The Cal of late might just as readily be understood as a deliberate strategy by Pirelli to speak more overtly to a female consumer. While women have long been recognised as frequently 'holding the purse strings' as the key purchasers of goods in traditional heteronormative households, demographic shifts have meant the independently wealthy woman consumer has become an increasingly significant market; one estimate has it that in the US 50% of luxury car sales are now decided by women and 75% 'influenced' by them (Friedman, 2015). Furthermore, commercial imperatives aside, even if there was an element of anti-sexist, anti-ageist social-activism in 'Emotional's' intent as Lindbergh is at pains to reiterate, it is necessary to reflect on how or whether the kind of rarefied space constituted by The Cal works counterproductively *against* somehow popularising or normalising older women /celebrities without

make-up. Through this mode of presentation in this space it becomes perceived as part of an 'edgy', arty, experimental project – the brand The Cal has cultivated - rather than being 'regularised' as a choice that might be of little consequence to many women, or simply an unexceptional part of just *being*. At the same time, for both older and younger women, the wider make-up free movement aligns readily with neoliberal, postfeminist discourses in which 'natural' and naturally-ageing beauty become further 'choices' to be aspired to and struggled over.

Nevertheless, at the end of our 2017 chapter Anne Jerslev and I asserted the importance of an 'aesthetic space for older women in which norms about appearance as older women are dissolved; in which the ageing body is constituted as a fact which should not be hidden from sight, but can be adorned in a plurality of styles' (2017: 231). Just as the backlash against #nomakeup included resistance to being *compelled* to be photographed make-up free on social media, a media landscape which coerces women stars to follow this route would be oppressive indeed. Rather, this article asserts that cultural gerontologists and scholars of feminist media and celebrity studies must extend the analysis that Jerslev and I initiated; asking, what might the spectrum of such aesthetic spaces for older women look like; *which* older women might occupy them and how since, as outlined, visibility in ageing is conditional and not equitable; and under what conditions might 'no make-up' prove to be a lasting or viable mode of participation within them? Thus the Pirelli 2017 calendar constituted an instructive exchange in a still unfolding but profoundly vital conversation, which will remain imperative as long as make-up remains a contested and incendiary theme within debates around feminist practice, the cultural regulation of 'beauty' standards, gendered consumerism, and the inequities of ageing.

One is reminded here, finally, of Roland Barthes' celebrated work on the iconographic potency of 'Garbo's face', a star whose 'authentic self' famously remained elusive throughout her career and who, not unrelatedly, Barthes refers to as having worn make-up with 'the snowy thickness of a mask' (2000: 56). Originally published in 1957, when Greta Garbo's withdrawal from public life as one of the most revered movie stars of her generation was already into its second decade following her retirement at just 36, Barthes asked, 'How many actresses have consented to let the crowd watch the disturbing maturation of their beauty? Not Garbo; the Essence must not degrade, her visage could never have any other reality than that of its intellectual perfection, even more than its plastic one' (2000: 56). And when situated alongside the kind of (enduring) mind-set Barthes invokes here,

however poetically – that of the ageing woman star as ‘*disturbing*’, of ageing as a process of ‘*degrading*’ – it would be obtuse to be merely dismissive of the actions of the women in the 2017 Cal. In the reception that met ‘Emotional’ one finds Pirelli momentarily extended a necessitous cultural dialogue about authenticity and stardom and about both the commodification and worth of ageing women, albeit as a commercial enterprise itself capitalising on the enduringly troubling figure of the ageing woman star. As the multivalent analysis undertaken here has demonstrated, the 2017 Cal underlines how critical scrutiny of the social functions of ‘make-up’ - that most synthetic, most trivialised, most compromised of ‘feminine’ interests - in fact lays bare much about the ways in which our culture de/values ageing and older women .

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ⁱ Although the distinction between 'star' and 'celebrity' remains a matter of critical interest, I do not deliberate here over the boundaries between their usage; on this see, for example, Holmes, 2005.

ⁱⁱ Indeed, shortly after this article was first submitted, the leading journal in this field of enquiry, *Celebrity Studies*, published an entire special edition in September 2019 dedicated to the theme of 'Authenticating Celebrity' (cf vol 10, no 3).

ⁱⁱⁱ I am grateful to Pamela Church Gibson here for sharing discussion on this point.

^{iv} While I am unable to reproduce images from the 2017 Pirelli calendar, note many are readily available on the Pirelli website (Pirelli, 2016a; 2016b), and reproduced in news articles such as La Ferla (2016) and Hou (2016).

^v As noted, contemporaneous and analogous in some respects to make-up free photography are body positivity movements such as the #EffYourBeautyStandards campaign and advertising initiatives like the Dove 'Real Beauty' campaign. The Dove campaign has proved divisive and been the subject of ardent feminist critique, however, as outlined by Jerslev (2018).

^{vi} In this respect it is notable that pictures of 'Emotional's oldest stars, namely Mirren and Rampling, were not as widely shared in the media coverage, though one might also note they are not as solidly thought of as 'Hollywood' stars, but rather European or British.

^{vii} Importantly, this scene was particularly embraced by black women audiences as a television milestone, and a marker of Davis's pronounced authenticity, for the fact that the actor insisted on removing not merely her make-up but her wig, thereby putting a black woman's natural hair on-screen in a manner which was widely heralded as landmark. For a detailed account of the scene's import and reception, see Sobande (2019).

^{viii} The significance of Joan Crawford as an instructive figure in the history of debates at stake here is neatly crystallised by the fact that Dyer elected to use one of Eve Arnold's portraits of her, taken from her 1976 collection *The Unretouched Woman*, as the cover artwork for *Heavenly Bodies* (Dyer, 1986: 1). The photo shows Crawford, now in her 50s, heavily made-up, getting ready in front of two mirrors framing her from different angles in which the larger mirror captures 'the Crawford image at its most finished' while the other more starkly reveals not merely the contours of her make-up, 'the processes of manufacturing' as Dyer puts it (ibid), but the lines and folds of her ageing face. Dyer recounts how we might locate two desires at work in Arnold's shoot; those of 'a photographer committed to showing women 'as they really are'' and a subject who wanted the photos to 'show what hard work being a star was' (ibid). This provides a framework which, over fifty years later, seems an equally illuminating standpoint through which to grasp some of the central issues at stake in Lindbergh's project.