When corporations come to define the visual politics of gender: The case of Getty Images

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Abstract

While stock photographs have come to saturate media and have been mocked for their clichéd nature, for example where women are pictured laughing alone with salad, a powerful corporation like Getty Images that disseminates commercial imagery globally has sought to challenge these stereotypes by making more politicized images. This article examines one such case, that is, Getty's Genderblend visual trend, which claims to portray gender identities and relations in ways that are both more inclusive and diverse, harnessing feminist theory as part of its promotion. Taking a multimodal discourse and visual design approach, the article looks at how corporate imagery can be styled as political and, in turn, how a politics of difference itself is shaped in the interests of the ideologies of consumer capitalism.

1. Introduction

Stock photographs are often mocked for their clichéd nature, for example where women are pictured laughing alone with salad (Grossman, 2014). Although they are frequently discounted as bland and insignificant, ready-to-use images are central to today's media culture (Frosh, 2003). Imagery portraying generic concepts, rather than specific people and situations, has become pervasive in journalism, advertising, branding, and both online and print publishing. Due to stock photography's increasing cross-media and global reach, the corporations that are responsible for the dissemination of these visual clichés have opened up to a wider range of styles and niche sub-genres (Frosh, 2013). In this changing marketplace, Getty Images continues to be the world-leading image bank.

In recent years, we have seen a deliberate attempt, on the part of Getty, to represent the company in politically conscious terms, and to address those points upon which the industry and the genre have received critique—particularly, the frequent resort to stereotypes. In keeping with popular digital media trends, Getty Images has first of all set out to "reach communities that are outside of mainstream media" (Seymour, 2015) through partnerships with platforms for user-generated imagery like Flickr, EyeEm, and Instagram. In addition, the corporation has infused the Getty Images brand with meanings that seem contrary to its hyper-commercial ethos. In this vein, the company's CEO Jonathan Klein used politicized language to promote Getty's new approach to 'repicturing' commercially fundamental keywords like 'family', 'business' and 'woman', stating that imagery has the 'power' to "galvanize movements", "to make governments change direction", and "for the voiceless to get an opportunity to speak" (Sachs, 2014). Finally, Getty Images has gone even further by seeking to make politicized imagery.

In this article we examine one such case, that is, Getty's Genderblend visual trend, which claims to portray gender identities and relations in ways that are more inclusive and diverse, harnessing feminist theory – particularly the idea that gender may be "a learned performance à la Judith Butler" (Grossman, nd) – as part of its promotion. According to Pam Grossman, Getty's Director of Visual Trends, Genderblend offers images that portray gender as "a nuanced spectrum" and rethink "previously fixed ideas of what it is to be male and female" (Grossman, nd).

At the heart of Getty's self-critical agenda is a tension between the increasing demand for commercial images to look distinctive, authentic, and diverse and the necessity to keep pre-produced imagery flexible and open-ended. Using multimodal critical discourse analysis, in this article we show how this tension plays out in relation to Genderblend. We also show what happens when 'difference' is mobilized in corporate communication. In doing so, we do not limit our analysis to the images themselves; we look at how these images have been promoted, using and in fact taking over a politicized language regarding gender. More broadly, this analysis allows us to understand how corporate imagery can be styled as political and, in turn, how a politics of difference itself is shaped in the interests of the ideologies of consumer capitalism.

2. Setting the stage: Genderblend at the crossroads of politics and marketing

Getty Images launched Genderblend as part of their "Visual Trends 2015" webinar in September 2014 (Getty Images, 2014). Here, Grossman notes an "evolution in terms of

expectations about gender roles". As evidence of this evolution, she cites brands' growing preoccupation in female empowerment and male nurturing, gender-neutral toys, Starbucks' adverts featuring drag queens, and Facebook's decision to significantly diversify its gender categories. In March 2015, Getty Images followed up with another webinar, this time dedicated entirely to "Genderblend: The new visual language of gender marketing". This sought to more clearly identify the features of the trend, which was developed by Grossman with "a global team of creative researchers" whose job is to "create images today, before you even know you need them tomorrow". Genderblend incorporates four themes: "Female Risen" (representing empowered women in 'alternative' industries); "Masculine Feminism" (representing men as women's equal partners, especially in child-rearing); "Post-Gender Poster Children" (focusing on the idea of raising children in gender-neutral ways); "Trans-Culturation" (concerning the rise in visibility of transgender identities). Lastly, Grossman refers to an overarching theme, "Slash and Blur", which admixes "all of the above".

It is not that the women laughing alone with their salads do not sell anymore, but that they coexist with concepts which challenge them. Along these lines, in 2014 Getty Images partnered with Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In foundation to curate a collection of 'feminist' stock photographs "devoted to the powerful depiction of women, girls and families" (LeanIn.org), with the motto "You can't be what you can't see". In the wider context of Getty Images' politicized framing of its product and business, Genderblend is especially interesting because it is 'just' a commercial endeavour that can only exist multimodally. While many of the images included in this visual trend are also part of the Lean In Collection, Genderblend is not the outcome of a strategic partnership or a curatorial project focusing on a single issue. At the most basic level, 'genderblend' is simply a keyword that, at the time of our analysis, yielded 374 images (against, for example, the over 7000 images of the Lean In Collection).

As a whole, then, Genderblend is constructed as a cohesive concept through a series of promotional materials aimed at intermediaries like advertisers, journalists, editors, and art directors. These include posts on social media, videos, press releases, and webinars. It quite literally 'blends' largely different claims regarding sexual, gender, and relational identities together in a discursive whole. At the same time, these stock images draw on three main semiotic resources that we define as typing, juxtaposition, and texturization. These are also design resources, insofar as they confer these images with a shared style and overall 'look'. In other words, they pertain to the visual treatment rather than the representational substance of images (Aiello, 2012; Aiello and Pauwels, 2014). As we will see, these design resources contribute to fashioning Genderblend images as different, or non-stereotypical, and diverse, or as foregrounding rather than standardizing specific identities.

In a nutshell, Genderblend's politicized discourse comes to life through (multimodal) design rather than (visual) representation alone. The problem here is not so much that Getty exploits activist language and social issues as a commercial opportunity. Clearly, Genderblend is part of Getty Images' "systematic attempt to recontextualize all issues […] to promote discourses suitable for branding and marketing" (Hansen and Machin, 2008, p. 792). In this case, though, Getty goes a step further. Rather than simplifying, abstracting, and depoliticizing the issue at hand to make it fit into the stripped back aesthetic typical of stock imagery (Hansen and Machin, 2008), with Genderblend we see an active attempt to make commercial photography both look and feel complex, concrete, and political.

The linguistic and visual resources that construct Genderblend are carefully orchestrated to communicate meaning potentials that go against mainstream conceptions of gender. In advocating for greater specificity and choice in the visual representation of identities and relationships, however, this politicized discourse effectively conceals and potentially naturalizes some of Getty's much more prosaic strategies for commercial gain. Through our analysis we will show how, in spite of its broader claims, Genderblend's take on gender equality is in fact uneven, if not unequal. We will also highlight how, rather than keeping to superficial connotations of authenticity and diversity, a globally powerful corporation like Getty Images now strategically deploys substantial challenges to major inequalities to define its own brand and remit. It is in this sense that corporate capitalism moves into the realm of actual social critique and, in doing so, also begins to colonize difference. While it is fine up to a point for Getty to claim a kind of benevolent role here, what becomes problematic is the company's pretense of meaningful political engagement to benefit its corporate agenda.

3. Aims and approach

We adopt an approach rooted in multimodal critical discourse analysis, as we aim to understand "the way that discourse and ideologies are disseminated generally simultaneously across different kinds of communicative modes and genres" (Machin, 2013, p. 347). We are also interested in the 'epistemological commitments' of different semiotic resources in the realization of specific discourses (Machin, 2013, p. 351). In the process of recontextualizing social practices like those associated with 'alternative' gender identities and relations into commercial imagery, particular kinds of people, values and behaviours may be concealed, abstracted or foregrounded through acts of deletion, addition, substitution and/or evaluation (Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). This kind of analysis allows us to point to the way that both 'difference' and 'diversity' are shaped for ideological purposes. As a fundamental part of this analysis, following the principles of social semiotics, we carry out both detailed description of texts and also place these within the processes of their production.

For a larger research project, one of us interviewed 40 photographers whose images are licensed by Getty Images. Six interviewees had some of their images tagged with the 'genderblend' keyword. In line with stock photographers' broader practices, these interviewees' photographs do not originate from a uniform approach to image-making. Some photographers used their friends, children and personal lives to stage portrayals of family life and leisure. Sometimes with the help of art directors, other photographers cast models and created sets from existing work spaces or sought out real-life contexts and people for their shoots, including female engineers, boat builders, and scientists.

As we will see, the disparate representational resources (i.e. portrayed subjects, objects, and settings) found across Genderblend images also correspond to a wide range of narrative structures, or actions and 'stories' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). However, Genderblend is also set apart by particular discursive devices, which we broadly define as 'tropes', that recur across its modes and media and that tell us something about this visual trend's overall discourse in relation to gender.

With this methodological framework and set of concerns in mind, we approach Genderblend through three main questions:

1) How is politicized discourse constructed multimodally? What are the key multimodal tropes that set apart Genderblend and what do they tell us about Getty's 'ways of knowing' gender?

2) How is difference visualized generically? What are the major design resources used to 'style' Genderblend images and how do they contribute to shaping a particular version/vision of inclusion and diversity?

3) What does this analysis tell us about the 'politics' of stock photography? How does Genderblend recontextualize issues related to gender inequality in the light of Getty's corporate interests?

We now turn to our analysis of Genderblend in relation to the wider context and research questions that we have just discussed.

4. Politicizing stock photography in promotional discourse: 'Blurring' and 'flipping' as key tropes

As we have noted, Genderblend has been promoted through a variety of online media materials – including articles on Getty Images' Visual Insights website, an iBook, Facebook posts, videos and photo-galleries – which contribute to 'constructing' it as a politicized concept. Perhaps most striking is the motivational and inspirational quality of much of the metadiscourse that sets apart this visual trend. For example, Guy Merrill, Senior Art Director at Getty, concludes his online article on the gendering of advertising and brands targeted at children with the following statement:

"What it's all about is choice – we need to give children the freedom to choose – we need to widen the range of options available and allow children to explore and develop their skills and interests – and they need to do this unconstrained by expectation and gender stereotypes." (Merrill, 2014)

Advertising has long aligned gender identities with practices of consumption (Gill, 2007), but what this discourse now offers is a greater range of choice. Indeed, rather than foregrounding activist struggle or political initiative, Getty's rationale for Genderblend draws upon celebrity endorsements (e.g. Beyoncé's 'Feminist' performance at the MTV Video Music Awards), popular culture (e.g. Laverne Cox as a television icon for the transgender community), and consumer-led 'movements' (e.g. "Let toys be toys" and "Let books be books"). The potential danger here is that political discourse about how we perform gender, and how we treat it as a society, is co-opted or displaced by such notions of consumer choice, and reduced to identification with commercial goods and services (see Lazar, 2014).

The two multimodal tropes at the heart of this politicized discourse are 'blurring' and 'flipping', which we will consider in turn. To begin, the notion of 'blurring' is constructed through an oft-repeated lexicon of terms like 'smudge', 'blend', 'transcend', and 'mix', on the one hand, in tension with 'boundaries', 'lines' and 'labels', on the other. Online articles with titles like "As brands smudge gender lines, don't forget the kids" and "Gender fluidity goes POP: Celebrating cliché-busting media and brands" reiterate the language used by Grossman in the webinar, in which she praises "brands and people who are blurring gender lines" such as celebrities like Conchita Wurst (see also Grossman, 26 February, 2015). She considers

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"gender not as a binary or a dichotomy, but rather a nuanced spectrum that is elastic and that can be borrowed from and blurred and mixed together in all kinds of fascinating and compelling new ways" (Getty Images, 2015).

As a trope, 'blurring' applies largely to Getty Images' portrayals of ostensibly queer or transgender individuals. In part, this trope also applies to children, in that there is an emphasis on "gender-neutral kids" along with images of children dressing up and 'cross-dressing'. This is especially evident when one considers the images chosen to illustrate key statements in matters of 'gender fluidity'. The Visual Insights article "Gender Fluidity goes POP" features a profile portrait of a young black woman sporting a Mohawk, a pink masculine blazer, a denim shirt with a bow tie, and a look of resolve on her face. A link at the end of this online article takes the reader to "a selection of Pam's favorite Genderblend images" (Grossman, 23 March, 2015). The lightbox assembled by Grossman is named "Genderblend – Fluidity" and features 14 images, which are mostly portraits of androgynous young women and men, transgender individuals (including celebrity Laverne Cox) and, in two cases, young boys—one portrayed as a ballet dancer and the other wearing angel wings, a crown made of wire and feathers, and a heart on his chest. As Grossman states in the webinar, this renewed approach to the portrayal of children in commercial photography relates to the "elevation of gender-neutral styling in children's fashion" and, in general, to how people – including Getty photographers – have begun raising children in more "gender fluid" ways. As she makes this point, the webinar presents a slide with four portraits of children performing in non-gender conforming ways, including one of the boy wearing angel wings and one of a girl tossing her hair as she plays the drums (Getty Images, 2015).

In the webinar, there are also several claims regarding the significance of "the rise in visibility of the transgender movement", with repeated references to 'legitimizing' factors such as awards won by television shows like Amazon's Transparent and actors performing transgender characters, the media popularity and celebration of transgender celebrities and ordinary citizens alike, and the sheer presence of transgender and transitioning individuals in the media—from Chelsea Manning and Lana Wachowski to Andreja Pejić and Caitlyn Jenner. When she lists the five "Genderblend Takeaways" at the end of her webinar, including the one titled "Embrace Trans", Grossman states that "certainly this is something that is developing right now, but we believe that this is going to be the next civil rights' movement". This reference resonates with Getty's earlier claims about the power of imagery. Photography, of course, played an important role in the Civil Rights movement and, indeed, Getty owns the rights to many of the most famous images that document those events. The distinction must be made, however, between these editorial images, which existed alongside much more explicitly political discourse and action, and the commercial context in which Genderblend imagery operates. A political movement is, to the people it mobilizes, more than a mere 'trend'.

Turning, on the other hand, to portrayals of cisgender men, women, and children (i.e. individuals with gender identities aligned with their sex at birth), a more prevalent trope is that of 'flipping the script' within the broader framework of heteronormative culture. Again, Grossman introduces this trope through a series of examples from popular culture. These range from successful female comedians like Amy Schumer and television shows featuring female superheroes, to an increasing focus on women in STEM industries. As one of the key themes of Genderblend, 'Female Risen' foregrounds portrayals of women who 'have made it' in alternative industries, traditionally male leadership roles, tough physical activities, and sports. The Creative in Focus video "Exploring the visual trend of Genderblend" includes a

section titled 'Females – Defying visual clichés' featuring a selection of images that 'flip the script' (see Barmada, 2014). Images of women's parental or domestic roles (indicated, for example, by the presence of a child, a pram, or an apron) are juxtaposed with their 'flipped' gender roles both inside and outside work (flexing muscles, wearing a powersuit, or carrying a briefcase). These women succeed in traditionally male jobs (they are firefighters, robot engineers, soldiers, and jet pilots), but they also exercise prowess outside of work (where they are depicted lifting weights, running through water, or some such physically demanding task). In the webinar as well as Facebook posts, it is noteworthy that this theme is highlighted through repeated reference to the Lean In Collection, and this strand of Genderblend can certainly be regarded as an extension of that project. Indeed, several images appear in both collections, particularly Thomas Barwick's images of female maritime engineers in Seattle.

Conversely, men are portrayed in more traditionally feminine roles. Thematically expressed as 'Masculine Feminism' in the webinar, and 'Fathers – Changing visuals of the caregiver' in the Creative in Focus video, this form of 'flipping the script' represents men as fathers and caregivers. In the webinar, Grossman associates this theme with rise of so-called 'dadvertising', or of commercial ads that show fathers not just "as goofy and inept" but also as "affectionate" mentors, guides and teachers. Once again, the Lean In Collection figures prominently in her discussion, as she highlights the 'leanintogether' keyword associated with imagery aimed at portraying men in nurturing roles. The 'Fathers' section of the Creative in Focus video shows a selection of images portraying men holding babies, changing nappies, or playing dress up with their daughters.

The concept of 'flipping the script' is also applied to images of children. As Merrill explains, Getty Images increasingly offer "[p]hotos of girls jumping in muddy puddles, climbing trees and riding plastic motorcycles and pictures of boys playing with teddy bears, baking and playing dress up have risen to the top of the bestseller list" (Merrill, 2014). Similarly, in the webinar Grossman highlights advertising campaigns aimed at young girls, such as Always' Like A Girl and Verizon's Inspire Her Mind (which reverse stereotypes regarding girls' physical abilities and mental horizons, respectively). Emphasizing the importance of these 'flipped' representations, she likens these corporate brands' commercials to "public service ads". The question, again, is whether we can rely upon corporations to necessarily act in good service of the public interest.

Genderblend is thus framed as an activist take on commercial imagery promoting "trailblazing" portrayals of individuals and relationships that reflect the "evolution" of social norms in relation to gender (Getty Images, 2015). The problem here is that this multimodal discourse not only fosters a celebrity-driven and consumption-oriented take on the politics of gender equality, but that it also de facto sets a double standard for how cisgender and heteronormative identities on one hand and transgender or queer identities on the other ought to be framed in broader social terms. This last point will become clearer through our visual analysis of key design resources, to which we turn in the next section.

5. Designing generic difference in visual images: Typing, juxtaposition, texturization

As we have seen, the production practices and representational resources underlying Genderblend are not inherently cohesive. Most noticeably, this visual trend combines images with high modality, which tend most often to represent Getty's notion of 'flipping the script' with low-modality images that seek to re-imagine gender through the notion of 'blurring',

often by incorporating whimsical and even fantastical elements. This said, our visual analysis shows that the images included in Genderblend share an overall 'look' defined by three key design resources, which contribute to communicating their subjects as different by styling them as types with particular attributes (typing), as contradicting an established norm (juxtaposition), and as firmly embedded in specific local or material contexts (texturization).

5.1 Typing: Using attributes to define the identities of portrayed subjects

A first design resource that is widely used across Genderblend images is typing. Unlike stereotyping, typing relies on an analytical approach to the portrayal of people and places. An analytical image "serves to identify a Carrier and to allow viewers to scrutinize this Carrier's Possessive Attributes" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 89). Stock images are often aimed at communicating 'types' by means of decontextualized activities and settings and an emphasis on typical attributes, frequently through the use of props (Machin, 2004; Hansen and Machin, 2008). Unlike in stereotyping, such attributes are not caricatural or exaggerated, but stand out because of the otherwise stylized treatment of an image.

In Genderblend there are two approaches to designing portrayed subjects as types. Firstly, there is an emphasis on personal physical characteristics and, and secondly, on objects such as clothing, accessories, and makeup, that are worn on the body. For example, work overalls, hard hats, safety goggles, high-visibility vests, lab coats, and sportswear tend to dominate in images of working and/or active women. From a narrative standpoint, these women often handle objects that aid them in achieving, doing, or making something (e.g. boxing gloves, barbells, bicycles, digital tablets, 3D printers, screwdrivers etc.).

Genderblend images tend to be 'analytical', as they define their subjects as 'blurring' gender lines or 'flipping' the script through key identifying physical or narrative attributes. However, most of these images do not bring out a given subject's most essential traits by 'taking away' other details and reducing life-likeness, or modality, by means of decontextualization (Aiello, 2013). Rather, in Genderblend types are often constructed as either ambiguous or as embedded in high-modality contexts, if not both. We see portrayals of androgynous men and women, whose 'in-between' features are highlighted by muted or no makeup, medium-length or edgy hairstyles, and either plain or no clothing. Images of different types of women 'at work' tend to rely on busy, cluttered settings rather than stylized backgrounds and, from a narrative standpoint, their actions are often shown in detail, with a particular emphasis on their holding and using some of the objects described above.

Lower-modality images – that is, studio shots or photographs with blurred backgrounds – are predominantly relegated to the practice of 'dressing up' mentioned earlier. Dressing up has become legitimate for everyone within the diegesis of Genderblend, extending beyond the more traditional realms of little girlhood to include not only young boys, but also adults. In particular, we find several images of men and boys dressed as fairies. 'Boy in blue fairy costume' (Getty creative #: 141808082) is one such image. However, the juxtaposition of gender signifiers at work here – the fairy costume (feminine) in baby blue (masculine) – represents a more complex relation than simply 'flipping the script'. This is because, within the role reversal which makes the boy a fairy, the gendered colour paradigm of pink for girls and blue for boys is sustained. The implication of this semiosis is that it is possible to be both a fairy and a boy and therefore also 'blur' gender lines. These images of male 'fairies' subvert the derogatory moniker of 'fairy' as used to refer to homosexual men. The symbolic currency of the fairy as a measure of femininity functions similarly to the way in which facial hair

connotes masculinity. It is worth noting, however, that indices of femininity for males, such as the fairy, often tend towards the fantastical.

As we have already indicated, this practice is not limited to the portrayal of children. The image of a 'Business woman holding a shield' ([90796845](#)) introduces a fantastical element to an otherwise conservatively dressed woman. It is reminiscent of the popular TV fantasy Xena: Warrior Princess, because of the subject's long brown hair and fringe. Alongside these openly fantastical images, studio images of young, non-androgynous men wearing theatrical makeup, lingerie and high heels co-exist with images of women playfully wearing fake moustaches or placing a thick strand of their own long hair on their upper lips. This points to the general tendency, across these images, to encode the attributes acquired as a result of 'cross-dressing' as 'dressing up' and therefore also as extraordinary and playful, rather ordinary and mundane.

5.2 Juxtaposition: Making comparisons to highlight deviations from the norm

Alongside portrayals that highlight subjects' 'typical' attributes, Genderblend images often rely on juxtaposition, that is, visual comparisons between clashing, though familiar attributes or between contrasting attributes and actions, settings, or moods (Aiello, 2012). In 'Father working from home while holding baby' ([511067269](#)), the portrayed man is wearing blue denim shorts and a light-blue denim shirt, and sports a full beard and dark short hair parted on the side. Sitting at his desk, he seems to be drawing with a digital pen on a monitor while holding a baby wearing only a nappy with his left arm. His hypermasculine grooming and physique stand in sharp contrast with the baby's delicate physical attributes and with his own nurturing posture. Across portrayals of men fathering small children, we notice a tendency to emphasize both the fathers' masculine attributes and the tenderness of their gestures. There is a predominance of muscular, bearded men wearing casual or rugged clothing, like checkered shirts, who are shown as they cradle, change or comfort infants, and play, cook or wash dishes with older children.

At times, visual juxtaposition takes a much more literal form. In several cases, attributes that are (stereo)typically associated with gender binaries are made to overlap. Some of these images include a bearded young man wearing a pink tutu, an older woman smoking a pipe, and a toddler boy riding a bright pink tricycle. In Genderblend, we also find several 'split' images, where a man's face is half made up and half not, or where two halves of different but equally composed images are placed symmetrically side by side to make a 'whole'— exploiting the opposition and creating an association between man and woman, or between a homemaker and a working woman.

Here juxtaposition becomes more properly multimodal only in relation to images that portray a subject featuring attributes and performing actions that can be considered 'gender normative'—like in the studio shot of a young woman posing in a bright bikini while lying on her back with her long black hair scattered around her; or in the several portraits of the same long-haired brunette woman wearing classic feminine clothes and giving another woman a manicure, or smiling while using a digital tablet. In the former case, the effect of juxtaposition is achieved through the combination of this fairly cliché, sexualized image of a beautiful young woman and the image's title, "Transgender individual" ([183188921](#)). Likewise, in the latter case, the various images featuring the same young woman feature titles like "Transgender man using digital tablet in room" ([560434269](#)) and "Portrait of a transgender man" ([560434285](#)). In both cases keywords include "transgender" and "beautiful woman". It

is also worth mentioning that, in both cases, the portrayed subjects are East Asian (respectively Thai and Japanese) and that their ethnic backgrounds add to meaning potentials of exotic and submissive femininity. This particular kind of juxtaposition between such visual clichés of femininity and linguistic claims of sexual difference is especially interesting because of the awkward ("Transgender individual") and even grossly incorrect ("Transgender man") approach that these images' titles have to defining portrayed subjects.

5.3 Texturization: Conferring texture to emphasize material and physical specificity

A third, perhaps more subtle design resource here is texturization, which elsewhere one of us defined as "the active deployment, amplification and organization of the graininess, consistency and concreteness of difference through visual and multimodal means" (Aiello and Pauwels, 2014, p. 282). In line with current trends in digital photography, and in spite of the analytical nature of many of these images, Genderblend is not set apart by lowered modality. Instead, many of these images are rich in visual cues pointing to "haptic and more broadly sensorial, indexical features" (Aiello and Pauwels, 2014, p. 282). Conferring texture to stock images contributes not only to making commercial photographs look more authentic, but also to highlighting both the physical and motivated, rather than conventional and arbitrary (Djonov and Van Leeuwen, 2011), characteristics of portrayed subjects—and hence also their differences.

Given the relative heterogeneity of these images, there are two major ways in which texturization is mobilized. On the one hand, we find images of high naturalistic modality where both portrayed individuals and settings look both realistic and contextualized. These images correspond overwhelmingly to the 'flipping the script' trope, and are set apart by busy if not cluttered backgrounds, documentary locations or, at times, deliberate lighting 'glitches' like lens flares in outdoor surroundings. By keeping backgrounds fully in focus and texturizing settings, these images suggest that the subjects' characteristics and behaviours are firmly embedded in the fabric of everyday social life, and should therefore be considered ordinary. On the other hand, Genderblend features a number of studio shots or close-cropped portraits of androgynous, cross-dressing, transgender, homosexual and, more broadly, queer individuals. What is highlighted across these photographs of individuals 'blurring' gender lines are the bodily textures of these subjects against the decontextualized or muted backgrounds that are typical of 'traditional' stock photography (Machin, 2004). Textural traits pertaining to the body include tattoos, muscles, chest hair, wrinkles and other visual cues pointing to an individual's physical substance and specificity.

There are two series of studio portraits that are particularly pertinent in terms of texturization. One series centres on a "transvestite Asian senior man" portrayed against a black theatrical backdrop as he poses and dances wearing a red corset, a black split front skirt, fishnet stockings, high-heeled red shoes, red lipstick, and a choker around his neck. His long white hair, beard, wrinkles and thin, wiry body stand in sharp contrast with these accessories and are foregrounded through subtle chiaroscuro lighting (see 560578893). In another studio portrait series, a "woman breaking the rules of gender" is pictured in 'men's clothes' (i.e. a black tie, a sleeveless white shirt, and white trousers), and both the textures of her full sleeve tattoo and of a mask that looks like a web of black lace around her eyes stand out against the flat dark background and the neutral colours of her clothes (see 548485119).

In sum, in the world of Genderblend queer identities are foregrounded in relation to individuals' physical attributes, but are dissociated from the everyday contexts in which they

may live, work, or relate to others. By texturizing the bodies of these non-gender conforming individuals, these images design difference as embodied, but also as disembedded from broader society.

6. Conclusion: The uneven gender politics of stock photography

Overall, Genderblend is discursively constructed as a visual trend that responds to various aspects of gender inequality through positive portrayals of non-mainstream identities and relationships. Both the multimodal tropes and visual resources associated with Genderblend work to communicate Getty's approach to stock photography as politicized, rather than merely commercial. The visual trend is designed to appear highly inclusive and diverse by means of design resources like typing, juxtaposition, and texturization. In addition, both due to the heterogeneous provenance of these images and the varied subject matter that is included under the Genderblend label, the experience of scanning these photographs through the layout of the Getty search pages contributes to this experiential feeling of inclusivity and diversity.

However, on closer inspection, there is also a deep divide in the politics advanced here. While Genderblend targets 'ways of seeing' gender as a binary through key multimodal tropes such as 'blurring (gender lines or boundaries)' and 'flipping (the script)', it also subtly separates such claims in two distinct realms. On the one hand, the notion of 'blurring' applies largely to ostensibly queer, androgynous, and transgender subjects. However, Getty's politicized discourse about non-gender conforming identities is almost entirely limited to their visibility, which is communicated as an increasingly significant aspect of popular culture. This approach is reinforced by their visual treatment, as these subjects are made visible in relation to their physical attributes and their inherent ambiguity or alleged dissonance from an otherwise established biological order. At the same time, transgender, androgynous and queer subjects are discursively taken out of everyday life contexts, particularly realms like work and family which, from a commercial standpoint, are also two of the most important areas of visual representation in stock photography.

On the other hand, 'traditional' gender identities are located within a different kind of politicized discourse, which emphasizes women and men's existing contributions and aspirations as members of society. In the world of Getty Images the 'flipping the script' narrative doesn't need to be justified; it is simply "something that feels more up-to-date, more progressive and more like today" (Getty Images, 2015). Rather than emphasizing cisgender identities' sheer presence and visibility, as if these alone were notable, this trope highlights these individuals' abilities (e.g. nurturing, leadership, fitness), relationships (e.g. with a child, with co-workers), and occupations (e.g. father, engineer, soldier).

The only subjects that traverse both the 'flipping the script' and 'blurring gender lines' tropes are children, who are allowed to perform ambiguous gender identities or, on the other hand, carry out tasks that are not typically associated with their genders, especially in the case of girls. Such 'freedom' applied to children is in itself problematic, as it is inherently tied to the notion of 'choice' and, specifically, consumer choice which now extends to decisions about how one can 'do' gender, for example, by 'dressing up'. It is certainly a noble cause, but the caveat must be that such redefinitions of gender are not limited to fields like media visibility and consumer practices.

To sum up, Genderblend is revealing of an uneven approach to the communication of differences, which privileges a version/vision of cisgender and heterosexual adults that 'flip

the script' as fully integrated into everyday life. Meanwhile, non-gender conforming individuals are relegated to a canon of visibility that is limited to their bodily attributes and is unlinked from social life. In addition to establishing these hierarchies between different 'classes' of gendered subjectivities, Genderblend also works to reinscribe its 'trailblazing' imagery into easily grasped clichés and assumptions. After all, both 'flipping the script' and 'blurring gender lines' imply that, rather than being fundamentally constructed, gender may in fact be the outcome of real roles and substantial traits. Such roles and traits may be questioned, though not truly debunked, through greater choice in representation—greater choice which, in the end, is carefully selected by a global corporation. And because Getty Images defines much of the world's visual language (Machin, 2004), this new visual repertoire of 'difference' may also come to define the world's visual politics of gender. Ultimately, Genderblend invites us to think of new kinds of gender identities as if imaginatively painted over an old canvas, but also as entirely 'reimagined' in the service of capitalism.

Acknowledgments

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