

MARCH 1, 1972

VOGUE



PERTI PALMROTH
(TILL WITTEW)



Yes, Yes, Nanette—it's a little white shirtdress of knitted wool, belted with mocha sueds for Guy D by Bill Tice. The big-time watch is from England, and the chattered earrings by Richelieu. Designer Palmroth makes the coats of softest black leather, zippers them thigh high.

It's in Vogue

DEAR T. H.: Doozy's desire to drink dirty water is probably less a matter of taste than of habit. Many cats will drink dirty water.

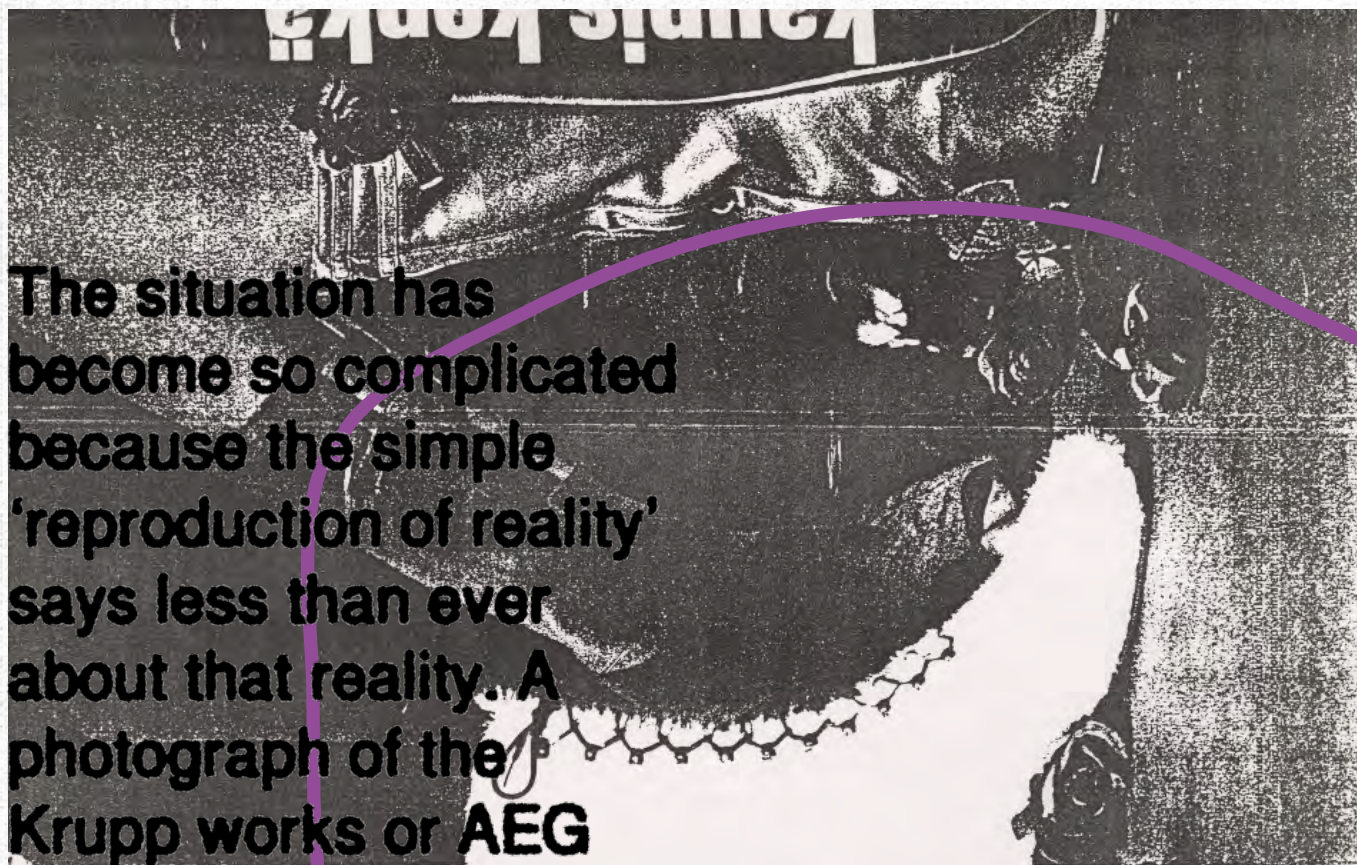
Foxy luxe-y, left: marvellous fur coat, h close to the body then wide ang to the b tops. Of blue fox paws with a fluffy blue : border. By Fernando Sanchez for Revill natural Norwegian blue fox. To order Saks Fifth Avenue. Turtleneck by Korrig Fringed gloves by Aris. Violet suede bo from Betty Bootery at Saks Fifth Aven Little pink riding hood, right: one of : happiest, most delicious capes anywh hemmed in Russian sable tails. By Ches Weinberg, at Revillon, of "Blackglam naturat dark ranch mink. To order at S. Fifth Avenue. Suede pants: Buckroe Cou try by Steve Saunders. Laced purple sui boots by Palmroth of Finland, at I. Mill

THE FAX!
THE FOLD!

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The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So there is indeed 'something to construct,' something 'artificial,' 'invented.'

Bertolt Brecht, *The Three-Penny Trial*



0 / Conception

Some time in the early 1960s, a Finnish designer jots a rough sketch of a pair of women's boots onto a sheet of scrap paper. His assistants finalize the sketch so that the boots can go into production.

I / Original

Shortly after, a shoe factory in Tampere produces a pair of quality women's boots. The boots' designer (and factory owner) himself will take care to travel the sales show circus and international fairs making sure the boots are placed with matching retailers.

II / Copy

Some time in the mid-1960s, an advertisement agency produces a piece of peculiar merchant poetry which manages to melt brand names into the flat, sort of mock-storytelling of the

fashion world: "Yes, Yes, Nanette—it's a little white shirtdress of knitted wool, belted high with mocha suede for Guy D by Bill Tice. The big-time watch is from Old England, and the checkered earrings from Richelieu. Designer Palmroth makes the boots of softest black leather, zippers them thigh high."¹ The ad is then placed in a glossy fashion magazine, perhaps in *Vogue* or *Elle* or *Harper's Bazaar*.

III / Copy of the Copy

Some time in the late 1960s, a fashionable woman feeling like a bon vivant heiress is parading down an avenue in some well-to-parade-in neighborhood. Her feet are dressed in a pair of Pertti Palmroth boots which softly snuggle up to her legs, zippered thigh high. With every step, the rubbing of leather against leather emits a gentle creak. The tough, yet silky hide squishes like an accordion in intricate ornamental folds and straightens again, leaving behind tender creases. The promenading woman knows that these boots unfold their quality in space and time; they want to be performed.

IV / Copy of the Copy of the Copy

Some time in the 1980s, a fax machine at Helsinki's Design Museum receives a string of incoming data. Clippings from fashion magazine advertisements, newspaper stories and quick hand-drawn sketches slowly creep out of the receiving machine's humming innards. Pertti Palmroth is sending over his work archive and on its way through the telephone lines it is translated into low-res, high-contrast black and white images. Line by line, an entire body of work materializes on a growing stack of 80g/sqm arctic white office paper. As the last sheet slides into the fax machine's

¹ By the way: "Yes, Yes, Nanette" is a pun on two 1930s and 1940s musical comedy films bearing the title "No, No, Nanette." The initiated contemporary ad-reader will have made the connection and picked up on a subtext hinting at the films' mildly sleazy plot surrounding a bon vivant heiress and her flings. So much for the art of merchant poetry innuendo.

receiving tray and the printer's squeaky rumble subsides, time freezes. This is the tail end of becoming, this is finitude. The thick stack of paper is lifted from the receptacle it just landed in and placed into an acid-free archival cardboard box. The box is then labelled, shut and shoved onto a shelf. Is there anything flatter than a fax?

V / Copy of the Copy of the Copy of the Copy

Some time in the Fall of 2020, I am asked to contribute to this volume and upon my agreement am sent the above mentioned faxes as research material. I was reluctant to accept the request as I have zero expertise in women's boots, nor do I exactly wish to gain any. But what immediately strikes and touches me when flipping through the papers is how far form and content fall apart, here, or rather, how violently they clash: Fax paper versions of glossy magazine ads are the fantastic meeting between the reality of any old office's pungent coffee breath and the lofty narratives of the high fashion world.

I have a strong urge to examine a physical copy of one of the ads that are as of now spread out in front of me only as these low-resolution faxes. After a bit of browsing I eventually manage to purchase a paper version containing the above-mentioned piece of merchant poetry. It's the actual October 1967 edition of *Vogue* or *Elle* or *Harper's Bazaar*, and it's glossy, alright.

The awkward thrill of seeing the spiffed up fictions of high fashion and the prosaic realities of the office lifestyle meshing is intensifying when I find two info brochures on Pertti Palmroth's business among my research documents. The brochures carry much of the anticlimax of an accountant's desk and little of the vibrant 5th Avenue allure evoked in that ad-blurb. They let me know about production runs, exports and the total square meters gained by company extension buildings.² And in a photograph

² Furthermore, I now know that the number of employees at Pertti Palmroth's factory in Tampere increased from 93 in 1974 to 200 in 1983 and that the company's turnover grew from 5 million to 35-40 million Finmarks in less than ten years. I know that at a certain time, the company was present at ten international trade shows a year, all of which were personally attended by Pertti Palmroth. I know that Palmroth

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that is attached to one of the brochures, I am not shown one of Palmroth's classy shoe designs, but an aerial shot of his factory building instead.

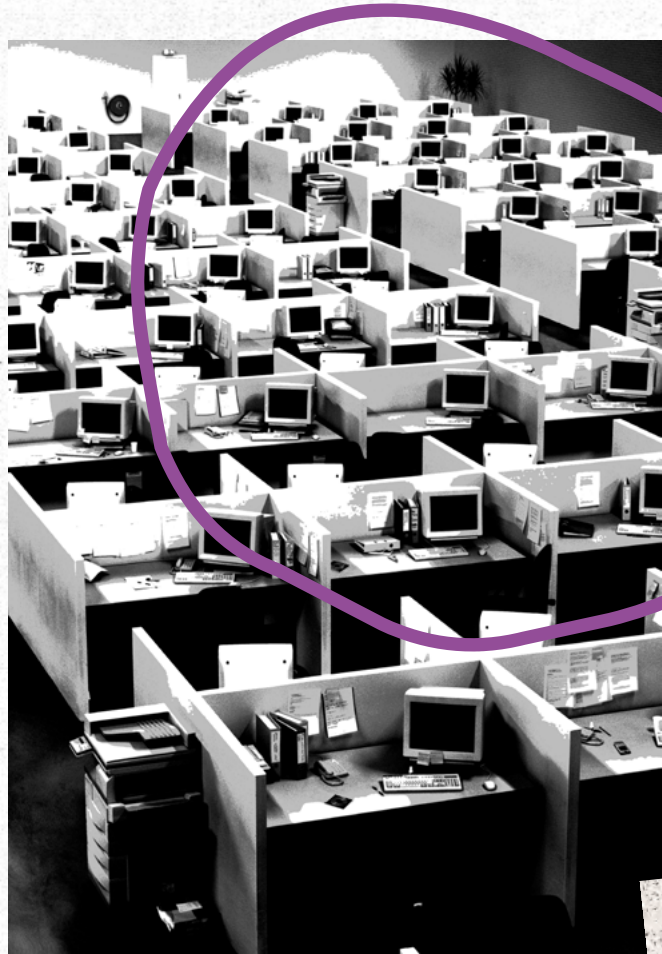
I wonder why all this gets me so excited. What exactly is colliding, tangling up and tripping over its designer boot-fitted feet, here? Worlds? Narratives? Ontologies? Ideologies?

VI / Copy of the Copy of the Copy of the Copy

Fax technology, as indicated above, is a merciless process of reduction: The sending machine rasterizes a document and determines whether its individual squares' color value is closer to white or closer to black. Pixel by pixel, it then passes this information on to a distant receiving machine via the hijacking of telephone lines.³ The information is quite literally trans-lated, that is moved from one side to an other.

In the act of compression and subsequent translation, however, the document is also trans-formed.⁴ It is distorted, squished, bent, folded, and flattened; it is forced to fit through lines that weren't designed to transmit this type of data at all. Much of what had constituted the original document is lost somewhere in the blackbox of this process of shoving disfigured chunks of information down cables to transgress time and space, and somewhere in the shadows of enlightenment's rational floodlights that are the gatekeepers to that which can and cannot possibly be, some dark transformational magic seeps into the workflow. When no one is watching, there is a chance that the brutal pressure of compression exerted on this set of data becomes too much and prompts it to suddenly flip and expand out into the receiving fax machine's receptacle as a downright baroque information spill.

ran a quasi-monopoly on all Finnish shoes imported to the USA and Canada and that he received the "President's Export Award in 1980.
³ Regarding the surprisingly interesting mechanics of the fax machine I can warmly recommend the wonderful tv-show "The Secret Life of Machines," produced for the British tv station Channel 4 between 1988 and 1993. It is fully available on Youtube.
⁴ The Latin etymon to the English term already contains this spin: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/translate#Etymology>



By the seemingly innocent act of faxing a glossy magazine ad serving narratives of imaginary splendor, distinction and the designer's artistic genius can shape-shift into a document of administration, informing me about the balance sheet-aspect of a design office, the utter bore of the day-to-day and petty workplace feuds. The faxed ad tells me something that I don't expect and that I don't particularly want to be reminded of while indulging in the world of merchant make believe. Of course, I know that every designer is also (perhaps first and foremost) a business person, a sales agent, a bookkeeper and so on. But in traditional modernist lore, these spheres are kept strictly separated, every facet is assigned its own cell—no osmosis, please.⁵ The tacit agreement of unambiguity, introduced by the exclusive demeanor of enlightenment thinking and policed by the (ongoing) project of Modernism must do away with contradiction. Something is one or zero, a black pixel or a white one, front end or back end. And now, in spite of or perhaps because of the radical reduction occurring when faxing out that fashion ad, this agreement is shattered. I must throw my willing suspension of disbelief under

⁵ A quick aside: The example of a (strategically) upheld division between art and work hinted at here neatly translates onto the culture industry at large and comes with tons of problematic philosophical and—more importantly—economic and political implications.
⁶ See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/explicate>

the bus as Pertti Palmroth's women's boots literally explicate⁶ to reveal intricately layered folds upon folds upon folds of what is essentially a single piece of leather. The creases and marks left in the material as one layer perpetually—and performatively—rubs against another, as the soft hide gets bent and folded, wedged and stretched, become an accurate representation of intricately folded reality. What was previously squished and is now unfolding like an accordion in front of me is compound and contradictory reality, performed and chaotic reality, real reality, if you will, the existence of which modernist tradition spares no effort to overlook. The designer, the assistants, the boots, the ad, the photograph, the faxes, the administration are not "either-or," they are "as-well-as."⁷ To summon Brecht, again: Perhaps a photograph of the [Palmroth] factory may not reveal much about the institution, but once the very same photo is faxed, it suddenly does.



VII / Copy of the Copy of the Copy of the Copy

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With my head spinning I once more inspect the ad in my physical copy of the 1967 Vogue or Elle or Harper's Bazaar sitting on my desk. Leafing through the pages, I am not sure what I'll find. There it is, and everything looks just like it should: A glossy full page sporting that weirdly poetic fashion advertisement. Slowly, I turn the page over and on its back side, I uncover a photograph of Pertti Palmroth's factory, which I am quite certain wasn't there before. I flip the sheet back to look at the ad again, but what I find once the page is fully turned is a faxed accountant's memo on 80g/sqm arctic white office paper. Turning the page once more, the magazine is now definitely defying Euclidian geometry: I see trade embargos and cafeteria lunches, broken pencils and blows of fate, creative crises and end-of-year balance sheets twisting around each other. I see tax reports and thrown fits, interdependent international markets and workplace romances intertwined in spectacular patterns. I see form and content, fiction and fact, time and space dancing wildly to exorcise my cognitive dissonance. I guess Bertolt Brecht never faxed his photos of the Krupp works or AEG to anyone.

⁷ Palmroth's faxes probably gained their magical powers, by being sent in the right historical moment: After all, the 1980s saw the peak of Postmodernist momentum and thus suspended basic premises levitating all around.