

Richard Avedon, Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent (1981)

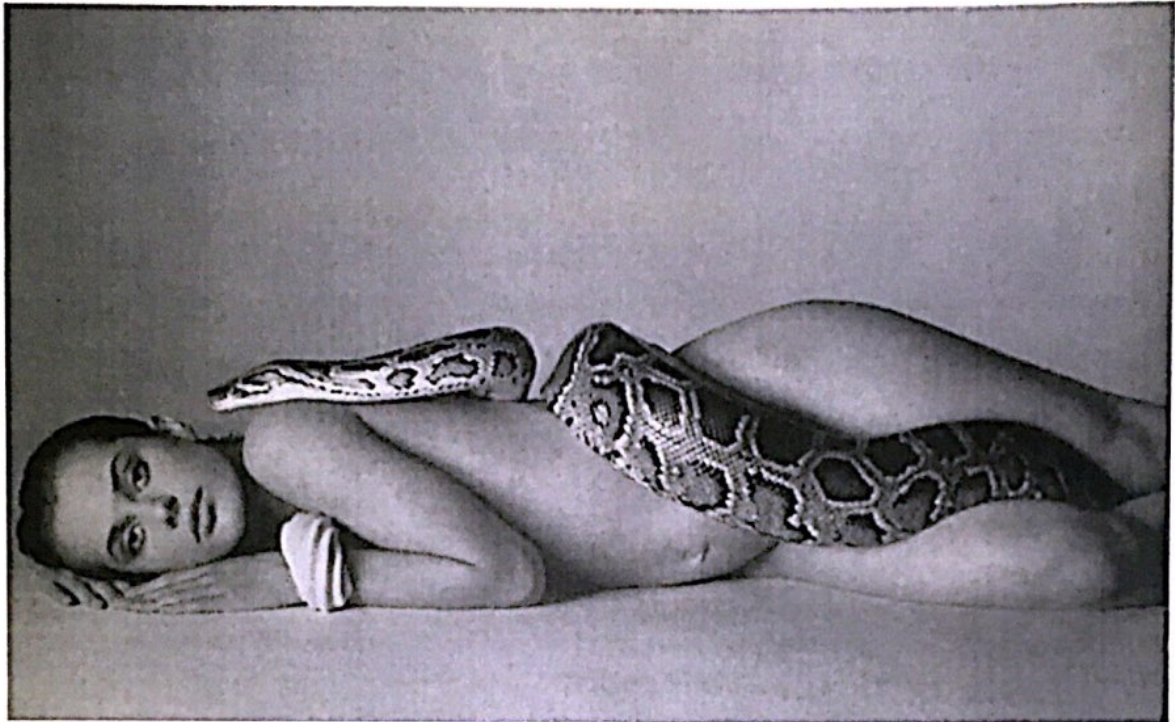


Fig. 1 Richard Avedon, *Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent* (1981).

→ I would disagree
1981 she was not household
name nor is she now.

A woman [evidently a well-known actress, i.e. it's not about "a woman" (just any woman) it's about a famous personality] lies on her side against a plain floor and plain background of the same neutral colour and material, gazing into the camera lens, naked except for a bracelet [I hate that bracelet, it reminds me of Mr Whippy ice cream! It's sort of out of place and distracts from the eyes and the snake] agree whole heartedly

and the massive coils of a Burmese python wrapped around her legs, waist, and shoulders. She appears calm, even serene. [She isn't calm or serene, she's aware of her own sexual attractiveness and everything about her pose and glance, not to mention the snake, is about seduction. I'm not sure what you mean by calm, perhaps you're referring to the slow seductive stillness of the image. She looks like a Venus flytrap to me!]

I think there is a sort of sexual nihilism in this picture. The snake seems about to bite the woman but she doesn't care, she is all instinct, her only purpose is to seduce, even death.]

Both she and the animal are long and sinuous—her own snake-like form is accentuated the cropping of the photograph at her knees which produces the illusion

I seem to remember to temptation
not enjoying with the advances
of the Snake.

that her body might somehow run on. She is pale, evenly and softly lit from a source which must be positioned outside the upper left corner of the frame since her face, arm, waist, and knee cast slight shadows the right. The subtle tonal environment of light and shade leads to a study of textures, materials, lights, and of subtle distinctions between skin and scale, body and background. The scene is undisturbed by action or event. [Your visual description is good.]

TRANS 1.

Or almost—looking very carefully reveals that in the midst of this scene of stillness the forked tongue of the snake flickers out to “kiss” the ear of the model—the tiniest sign of vital aliveness in an otherwise perfectly calm image.

Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent shot in 1981 is one of Avedon's most famous and iconic photographs, yet it also departs from his usual style of the period, where he photographed both famous and unknown figures against a stark white backdrop with no contextual information. These portraits reveal Avedon as “radical and brutal,” [sounds a lot like a quote that isn't backed up. Is this radical or brutal?] his photographs exhibiting “a duality: they are photographs taken by a strong, complex personality, a photographer who possesses great humanity—and cold-bloodedness” (Avedon & Crenzien, 2014). Avedon's portrait of Duke and Duchess of Windsor being one of the most famous, whereas is in *Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent* we see a return to the softer, more sensual fashion images typical of his earlier work. [They are similar. The studio set-up, the pale background, the eye-contact.]

or quote -
turbulent
paraphrasing
carried here
It was both m7
was perhaps

↓
Yes but much different to the Windsor or americana portrait
or akin to earlier fashion images and the Elephant Picture



Fig. 2 Richard Avedon, Duke and Duchess of Windsor (1957)

Avedon's images usually emerged out of lengthy studio sessions and in his own words "A photographic portrait is a picture of someone who knows he (sic) is being photographed, and what he does with this knowledge is as much a part of the photograph as what he's wearing or how he looks." (Avedon & Williams, 2004). This approach distinguished Avedon's work from that of the American street photographers, such as Diane Arbus. Nevertheless, this [his] method enables him to produce images that remain with the viewer – they have punctum. The punctum in *Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent* is the flickering tongue of the snake caressing Kinski's ear. [It may be, it may not. But you've got to be careful about trying to point out the punctum in every photo. Some don't have punctums. It's a personal thing. And why would a punctum be the snake's tongue instead of the seductive eyes, which are invariably the 'punctum' of just about every fashion image?]

See idog pair.

Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* introduces and makes a key distinction between *punctum* and *studium*—the latter standing in for the general cultural, social, and historical context of meaning in images. Barthes defines punctum "is the sting,

speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (Barthes, 2012). Here the "pricked" nature of the punctum which Barthes defines with this physical metaphor, seems almost literally to be true as the snake's tongue flicks against the model's ear. In fact, the punctum could almost be redefined as the lick of the snake's tongue—the moment when the totally unpredictable, thrilling, ever-so-slightly dangerous event occurs and is captured on camera. The serenity of the model only serves to heighten the intensity of this flicker of punctuating action. [Consider cutting this out, it's not necessary to describe photo theory to the viewer.]

good point
✓ will look at
streamlining.

Taking a boarder view, Avedon's *Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent* is typical of the way in which Avedon changed the traditional fashion image from one in which the model appeared as little more than a "clothes horse" whose role was to passively exhibit fashion ensembles, to one in which the model was treated as a subject in their own right. [This is good. You could expand on this in later writing. Avedon began to treat mannequins as people and now models are famous people!]

Traditional posing had been static, in this image Avedon moves away from this convention in multiple ways: firstly, by presenting the model nude, clothed only by a reptile and bracelet; second, by having the model lay down supine and be cropped at the knee; and third, by capturing an unpredictable chance encounter.

Punctum.

←
rephrasing
with lines

Consider

Triangle.

The portrait emerges out of the juxtaposition [this is another good point about the design, that it's about an unlikely clash of human and animal. He did another one of a woman with an elephant I think] of the human form of Nastassja Kinski with the reptilian form of the snake. The imminent threat which the snake seems to present an intense contrast with the vulnerable body of the female subject and serenity of her

keeps the image alive and interesting to look at closely. This juxtaposition also produces confrontation between a public image and what Avedon sees (or perceives) in the subject. Kinski was familiar at this as one of the most beautiful women of the time, who whilst she had exploited in her earlier roles, was beginning to gain control of her career and image. Avedon has succeeded in placing her in a situation that produces unexpected sensations. [Not sure they were unexpected!

This feels very 'designed'. It may have been designed by a advertising art director.]

With this juxtaposition, Avedon's photograph raises fundamental questions about the power of photography itself. Speaking of his early experience with photography, Avedon recalled how "all the photographs in our family album were built on some kind of lie about who we were and revealed a truth about who we wanted to be" (Avedon & Mooallem, 2017). [You could've started the essay with this, it's the most interesting thing here and it's linked through the essay by various strands. The visual description could be removed or shortened.] Throughout his career, Avedon negotiated this balance between truth and fantasy very skilfully. It is this quality which makes *Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent* such a compelling picture since it manages to tread the fine line between fact and fiction. While its lighting and tonalities all describe a real relationship between body and space, the event we witness has the mark of the unreal. The portrait appears to cast Kinski as Eve, [This also should've been closer to the beginning] falling for the temptation of the serpent, however, Avedon has captured that precise moment where it is clear that this Eve is not interested in what the serpent has to offer, nor she frightened by the power the serpent wields over her. Avedon perhaps saw and captured what Nastassja Kinski was sub-consciously trying to achieve within her career and image—to do things on her own terms. Something that would still take a while come. This sounds pretentious. Is

Yes - Essay needs reordering.

Designed if you consider it was designed for student could in the 1980's unexpected when it was now given I'm seeing strength

it true? She doesn't seem afraid that's true, but isn't that part of the photo, part of Avedon's direction? It isn't necessarily a part of a wider issue with the actor's career.

~~When we~~ When we ~~are~~ are reading in ~~the~~ 2018 post, ~~the~~ given knowledge of her life we didn't have then - we can read strength resistance to film mogul pressure (#mcloo I guess has brought this to mind) although I not use this in essay.)
I not trying to be pretentious but ending the essay on point to keep the reader engaged.

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I have included her lds or newspaper
articles collected over the research that has
repeated information and should be culled.