

“I Wear Pasolini”

***Icon*-men, Fashion Branding and the Intellectual as Celebrity**

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Why Pasolini?

In March 2015, the magazine *Icon, Uomini e stili* published a photo-editorial entitled “Ragazzo di Vita”. A quarant’anni dalla scomparsa, omaggio a Pier Paolo Pasolini”. Pasolini was impersonated by a fashion model, dressed to evoke a mild, self-conscious informality, placed in a number of settings reminiscent of the Italian 1950s, 60s and 70s. This construction is embedded in contemporary celebrity culture, where fashion industry’s marketing exploits the centennial machineries of film stardom and the idea of a trendy individuality is expressed through brand-oriented modes of consumption. That the actual Pasolini at no point appears in original pictures is a significant fact, which is linked to the specific editorial procedures of serialized communication characterizing a life-style magazine like *Icon*, and therefore merits critical analysis. *Icon*’s photo-editorial shows the Austrian top model, Werner Shreyer, interpreting Pasolini in a variety of poses: sitting at a typewriter, kneeling on the floor self-absorbedly drawing artistic sketches, or else standing surrounded by a group of young men whose appearance is decidedly more polished than that of the literary models on which they are based, nevertheless mindful of the

tragic intensity of Pasolini's earliest and best-known novels: *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959). *Icon* picked Pasolini to make one of its portraits of masculine lifestyle. What motors of appeal are involved, besides the more obvious interest in commemorating the artist on the fortieth anniversary of his death?

Pasolini was «a star in his own right, gaining notoriety for his lifestyle, his homosexuality, his physical attractiveness, his rocky relations with the Communist Party, his [...] cinematic experimentation [...] his violent death» (Landy 2008, p. 215). Of all the spheres of meaning touched by Pasolini's fame, it is Pasolini-the-writer that dominates *Icon's* images. A reserved man, he reads or writes in a bedroom furnished in a style reminiscent of the 1950s. There is also a perspective on Pasolini as a luxury-car lover: one of Shreyer's portraits shows him in the foreground wearing a denim shirt, while an Alfa Romeo sits gleaming in the background. It is the famous Giulia GT 2000 Veloce, a blue version of the car owned by Pasolini. One image portrays Shreyer sitting in the car next to a young man, creating a meaningful tension between self-exposure and discretion and coupling the idea of Pasolini's relations with young lovers with that of refinement. Pasolini's films are hardly touched upon in the imagery activated by *Icon's* editorial. Hints at a repertoire of cinematic images or stories are missing, except, perhaps, for a veiled reference to Ninetto d'Avoli. It is not his creative effort in film, nor his public persona as a film-maker, that appear in *Icon's* construction of Pasolini's mythic persona. Taken overall, *Icon's* pages set a distance from the aesthetic of wealth and leisure traditionally associated with the cinematic milieu's *dolce vita*, distinctively embodied by a number of iconic film-makers (most prominently in the Hollywood milieu, but also in the era of classic Italian cinema: Fellini, Rossellini, or De Sica). To draw on Bourdieu's notions of taste and distinction, *Icon* constructs instead Pasolini's distinctive personality by emphasizing his cultural and intellectual capital, which allows for a detachment from obvious and overt expressions of wealth.

On the other hand, Pasolini’s portrait also conforms to a well-established meaning associated to the film star: «the construction of identity in the domains of consumption as opposed to production», where the star appears as an image of lifestyle – «an image of the way in which a lifestyle/identity could be found in the domain of non-work». The star, according to what David Marshall identifies as a specifically cinematic legacy – performs a «consumption ideal» (Marshall 2013, p. 92-93). That is to say, the star’s luxurious lifestyle and his/her role in the industry (a symbolic «non involvement in material forms of production because of his or her work solely in the manufacture of images») (Marshall 2013, p. 94) illustrate a principle of pleasure through consumption and embody an ideal wellbeing. Since the inception of consumer society in the 1950s, consumption habits, rather than production behaviors, have been privileged vehicles for making identity statements.

Therefore, Pasolini is called here to re-activate a democratic myth of identity construction through consumption that crucially involves the entertainment industry, dating back to the origins of cinema’s capitalization on stars, where the star is both an object and a vehicle of consumption. This only partially contradicts Pasolini’s actual stance against “ideological hooliganism”, which he recognized in late-capitalist bourgeois behaviors and young people’s protests. To better understand how *Icon*’s fashioned idea of Pasolini can be influential on popular consumption habits, we should consider how style, poses and atmosphere evoke here a symbolic self-positioning. It is an attitude reminiscent of Pasolini’s peculiar knowledge of – and involvement in – the social mechanics of taste and behavior. Pasolini’s overt condemnation of consumer society went hand in hand with the acknowledgement of his own bodily involvement in it. Starting in the 1960s, through poetry, essays, interviews, and films, Pasolini insistently criticized the new models imposed on young people by capitalism. In his claims of the fall of true expression – including youth attire and

body language (Colaiacomo 2007) – in favor of «dull communication» (Pasolini, 1973, my translation), he exposed the risks of a collective aphasia, of a brutal absence of critical capacity. The «anthropological genocide» he commented upon violated «even the “reality” of innocent bodies [...] manipulated and tampered with by the consumerist power». And yet, in experiencing what he called the “dead body” of an entire society, he could not help «accepting the unacceptable» (in his own words), therefore living – as he declared – this pure degradation in his own body (Pasolini 1993, pp. 382, 603; Chiesa 2007, p. 225).

The celebrity’s pose

According to Paola Colaiacomo, Pasolini

can’t help being at the same time inside and outside [what he repeatedly defines capitalistic] entropy: the world of consumption appears in his eyes at the same time banal and innovative, transitory and productive... [He] assumes in his behavior the same neurotic phenomena of a type character (Colaiacomo 2007, 24, my translation).

Pasolini’s dual position – authoritative and critical in terms of discourse; personally implicated in terms of behavior – is turned here into a celebrity pose: the celebrity’s sign of uniqueness and attainability that renders him palatable. Pasolini’s dandyism could not exist without Street Style and subcultures appearing in the 1960s, when *trickle-down* (higher classes’ models and behaviors propagating to the masses) was replaced by *bubble up* (the opposite tendency). The leather jacket *Perfecto*, also worn by Pasolini, is an emblem of this flow of tendencies: initially confined to the subcultures and later turned into a cinematic icon (embodied in the 1950s by Marlon Bran-

do), it landed on the high fashion catwalks in the 1990s after having marked a popular Street Style revival in the 1970s (Frisa 2015, p. 31).

A contemporary Dandy, Pasolini represents, for the benefit of *Icon* readers, a radical use of personal life embodying a singular poetic vision and a stance against society, which can be understood only decades after his death. Yet, knowing Pasolini’s work is not important in the consumption of his celebrity. Nicola Mirenzi has recently claimed that Pasolini is the most quoted intellectual in Italy, and the less read. Uses of Pasolini come from the political left as well as from the right and the Catholics. In addition, as Mirenzi underlines, «everybody has picked the fragment that was useful for himself or herself and has expanded it so as to have the entire image». In this process, where Pasolini can be transformed into a souvenir or picture postcard (Mirenzi 2016, p.7, my translation), the world of fashion, allied with the publishing sector, plays a pivotal role of cultural intermediary. It does so through a plethora of professional figures, including designers, photographers, editors and journalists, all participants in the process of celebrity construction.

In this sense, *Icon*’s editorial is to be seen in the context of a wider phenomenon of circulation of images and discourses which ascribe to Pasolini a leading role in the realm of taste and fashion contents. In 2010, *Vogue* published a brief editorial claiming that Pasolini had anticipated a number of youth trends, commenting on his idea of fashion: his prediction of how contemporary living would unfold «as constantly inside a ballet», his taste for a modern and provocative elegance, his intuition on the future symbolism of jeans and leather jackets *à la* «teddy boys», his insightful observations on a youth that «seems born to pose», his anticipation of vintage fashions and the return to the metropolitan style featured by Alexander McQueen in its 2010 collections (Serino 2010).

Icon’s article might be considered the culmination of a process of image dissemination stemming from the commemoration of the forty years since Pasolini’s death. Starting with photographic exhibitions,

newspaper commentaries, paratextual materials associated to film exhibitions and lifestyle/fashion magazines (including *Marie Claire*'s November 2015 issue, which makes use of selected archive images emphasizing "Pasolini's eclectic style"), this dissemination favored polished images, refined portraits and a vintage aesthetic. The salvaging of private and public shots of Pasolini highlights clothes, gestures, favorite venues and friends. It contributes to construct him as an icon of style, also consolidating an array of "Pasolinian gestures" – such as the film-maker looking in the camera, shot in profile, with thick-frame glasses. The commemorative events in public spaces generated a proliferation of images on the web and an exuberant propagation of interpretations and appropriations. *Icon* capitalizes on all this, but goes one step further, by abandoning Pasolini's archive images and manufacturing his portrait with the aid of a repertoire of clothes and a selection of brands. It peculiarly articulates what has been variably underlined as the specific meaning of celebrity: a sociological phenomenon that exits films, music performances, or any other entertainment product and enters, symbolically and actively, the lives of the audiences (Marshall 2007, p. 12). *Icon*'s Pasolini abandons the spheres of poetry, journalism or cinema, and triggers a set of actions at a material level: shopping according to an idea of personal, unique taste. Buying *Icon* is an act of consumption, while flipping through its pages allows for an acquisition of competences.

Icon's Pasolini does not simply capture a segment of readers in terms of purchasing power. As Marisa Luisa Frisa maintains, «fashion consumption today functions as a doorway to the grand narrations, where everybody, with the complicity of the branding system, feels able to enter as a protagonist». The engine of fashion is no longer an external authority: «Today, on the contrary, we want to be – and we like to think we are able to be – the creators of our shape: the one we offer on the street, at work or at home» (Frisa 2015, p.17, my translation). *Icon*'s Pasolini activates a claim of the old aristocratic posi-

tion through pose and *mise en abyme* of the appareled body. In some respects, he activates the spheres of meaning of the Dandy: a past-oriented gaze and a self-conscious bodily investment in identity statements – which implies expressing a truth through style, arbitrariness in trespassing codes, and classy inconsistencies.

Icon's photo-editorial mixes high end brands (Dior Homme, Gucci, Valentino, but only accessories) and middle to middle-high brands (Roy Rogers, Daks, Golden Goose Deluxe) and makes a collage of clothes (blue jeans paired with double-breasted jacket, a parka worn with a tie). There are no traces of the innovative or extreme expressions of luxury design – apart from the car, which was Pasolini's one outstanding emblem of lavishness, and therefore a celebrity sign. A reserved nonchalance prevails, expressed by formally cut jeans, blazer jackets, urban ties, and white shirts with French collars. Direct reference is made, of course, to Pasolini's dressing habits: the suit jackets, the shirts, and pullovers he used copiously in the 1950s and 1960s – and the distinctive glasses. They express a personality self-confidently denying blatant self-exposure and yet making precise stylistic choices. The general mood, also shaped by the abundant black and white photography, is oriented toward the past, simplified in design and atmosphere. The 1950s, with their the sense of rigor, seriousness, solidity (evoked, for example, by the double-breasted blazer and the Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter), are here mingled with the fashionable, self-conscious 1960s (decipherable in the more flamboyant shirts, in the dandyism of Shreyer's poses). A few glimpses of the 1970s are included, suggesting the themes of speed and social unrest: the sports car, the parka, the leather jacket – also hinting at the troubled masculinity of the American 1950s.

The predominance of the 1950s and 1960s differentiates *Icon*'s creative re-working from the films that have recently elaborated the Pasolini myth. Abel Ferrara's film (*Pasolini*, 2014) and David Grieco's one (*La macchinazione*, 2016) – and even Marco Tullio Giordana's 1995 *Pasolini. Un Crimine italiano*, featuring archive im-

ages – revolve around the political and cultural climate of the 1970s. *Icon*'s aloofness from the political engagement of Pasolini's later years instead allows insight into the poet's vision. This is emphasized by the words of the journalist and biographer (of Giorgio Armani, for example), Renata Mohlo, who comments on «his dressing's lucid essentiality», and «his heretical outdatedness, his visionary talent». Pasolini's «elegance is to be found in his thought and in his capacity to see poetry in the mud» (my translation). In addition to Moholo's words, a quotation from *Una vita violenta* highlights Pasolini's capacity to transfigure Roman suburban boys' rags into silk and embroideries. This emphasis on Pasolini's educated insight in matters of attire is the key to his appeal to *Icon*'s readers.

Blurring lines

Icon does not only display abiding mechanisms of star consumption. It also updates them, and indeed casts light on how the contemporary cult of celebrity has blurred some of the borders in the world of entertainment, culture, and information – a complex of boundaries that in different historical circumstances had separated actors from models, creators from marketers, artists from icons, journalism from publicity – which now appear weakened and faded.

The formulaic structure of a magazine such as *Icon* reinforces this smudging of contours. From an aesthetic, stylistic, presentational point of view, the personalities appearing on each of *Icon*'s covers share many points of similarity, although their professional identities are different. Most of them are actors – covering a spectrum of specialties, from big Hollywood productions, to television series or Broadway shows. However, football players, singers and musicians are also featured, and therefore placed on a similar level of meaning. The way these men appear in the magazine intermingle attire with

personal opinions and statements. Meaningfully, David Bailey, one of the most renowned portrayers and icon of fashion photography, appeared in November 2013 on an *Icon* double cover, alongside Cillian Murphy. He is the inspiring artist of *Icon*'s portraits in terms of character, style, and interpretation and his appearance marks *Icon*'s return to the open market and distribution in the newsstands.

Founded in 2003 by two ex-footballers, *Icon* was originally aimed at a celebrity readership and not sold in shops. It addressed and featured professional football players and, later, other categories of sports people, plus actors and television personalities. In 2008 its direction passed to two pioneers of the men's magazines sector, Andy Clerkson (*Maxim USA*) and Ed Needman (*FHM* and *Rolling Stone*), who created *Icon*'s mandate as it appears in Italy today (owned by Mondadori, it is now directed by Michele Lupi, as *Rolling Stone*, *GQ Italia*, *Vanity Fair*, *Flair*). Addressing non-exclusively-male readers in search of refined and unostentatious personal styles, *Icon* now accompanies the readers through various itineraries allowing identity statements through profession and leisure, with a specific artistic bend. The men who appear in the magazine become *Influencers*. In other words, a power of interpreting fashion contents, conveyed by Bailey's "patronage", is equally shared by actors, musicians, or sportsmen ie. professionals not *creatively* involved in fashion's meaning making.

Icon-men are portrayed according to a specifically "Baileyan" iconography: black and white low-key photography, an emphasis on one symbolic gesture or expression, the absence of a meaningful background. All such elements produce an "embodied elegance". *Icon*'s covers illustrate the convergence between celebrity construction and seriality's foundational repetition, where asserting meanings go hand in hand with recurrent patterns of consumption. This seriality is sustained by expectation, surprise, back referencing, variations, combinations: ultimately, on narrative principles. Pasolini, whose name is not announced on the cover, is an abrupt encounter on the

magazine's pages. His appearance, the reader infers, is justified not only by an outstanding personality and the historical occurrence (the anniversary), but also by a set of lifestyle themes that make him an *Icon*-man. Such is the mechanism of expectation-surprise of *Icon*'s system of serialization.

Pasolini's portrait peculiarly intersects with several different spheres of celebrity construction: the film star, the fashion model, the television celebrity, the intellectual as icon. As mentioned above, the film star's cultural capital is called into question: «each star is one of the key representatives of individual creativity and artistic practice». And so is the correlated economic capital: «because the star emerges as the economic center of any production» (Marshall 2007, p. 188). Indeed, some of the fashion industry's subjects here involved capitalize on Pasolini's distinctive individuality. On the other hand, it is the top fashion model who appears on *Icon*'s pages. He is a vicarious figure of Pasolini's celebrity, indubitably lending to the poet a set of added meanings. Shreyer does not convey a surplus of international fame, as Willem Dafoe does in his interpretation in Ferrara's film *Pasolini*. Nor does he bring into play the cultural memories and specifically Italian collective meanings delivered by Massimo Ranieri (*La macchina*). Rather, he introduces a specific performance as photographed beauty, and as a model endowed with a personality. Shreyer is an experienced, mature top model who has characteristically drawn from, even quoted, famous actors in his fashion-shoots: James Dean, Marlon Brando, Alain Delon, Jean Paul Belmondo, Gerard Depardieu. He has a repertoire of poses and gestures to describe masculinity, involving a number of key features: introspection, vision, and a certain restlessness. And he preferably appears in vintage apparel. Therefore, Shreyer corresponds in the first place to a target market, meeting inclusively a costumer with hetero- or homo-sexual leanings, who appreciates a definition of masculinity involving a past-oriented gaze, a non-muscular elegance, and a reference to the

golden ages of cinema.

An oblique dialogue with some codes of the televisual celebrity might also be detected. On the one hand, conductors and anchormen, participants in reality shows, game players and anybody turned famous, are the anti-models of Pasolini's aloof depiction. This portrayal indeed infers televisual forms of «populist challenge to more elite societal structures» and reality TV's challenge to authenticity (Holmes 2006, p. 45), rejecting them. On the other hand, Pasolini is here subdued to a domestication of entertainment, mainly enacted by television and spread through the other media. Unlike the film star, whose image is constructed to maintain a «larger-than-life» persona, the television celebrity's personality is configured around a «heightened level of intimacy» (Redmond 2006, p. 28), an intense focus on the personal, the psychological, and a familiarization of the unfamiliar, contributing to construct an inclusive as opposed to an exclusive audience. Selling audiences to advertisers, television has scarcely claimed a creative function in the field of celebrity making (Marshall 2013, pp. 119, 131). Similarly, a trend in the editorial industry (Martina 2016) that *Icon* fully represents does not claim creative primacy over other cultural industries - or even over other highbrow lifestyle magazines, as *Vogue* does, for example (*L'uomo Vogue* o *Vogue Hommes International*). Leveling the readership to a selected middle-market, *Icon* does not reach prominence as a production environment. It rather circulates contents created by other sources and involves its readership in a net of brands, offering in return images of controversial personalities that are much more inclusive than the originals.

Publicity and brands

Sustained by the pervasiveness of fashion's imagination, *Icon*'s creative operation goes hand in hand with a changing system of publicity

fully embraced by the fashion milieu. New directions in the presentation of promotional content appear to have blurred the distinctions between consuming and influencing and between exclusiveness and normality, owing much to the Internet and to the overwhelming brand-oriented policy of fashion production and marketing (Macchi 2011). Such are the phenomena of fashion bloggers, or e-commerce and Native Advertising. In particular, the fashion industry, which has in the past decade rushed into digital communication, was among the first to embrace native digital advertising (Schirinzi web), which conveys branded content obliquely, integrating it within the audience's reading, viewing or listening experiences. Native Advertising visualizes sponsored content within other contents viewers are offered while navigating the web. Unlike traditional publicity, which aims at communicating while distracting, native advertising is immersive; it does not distract readers from their activities and is immersed in the readers' context. In this way, publicity creates an engagement with them, assuming the same semblance as the contents they are consuming.

Until the early years of the new millennium, advertising was easy to identify on the pages of a newspaper and the difference between sponsored content and critical content was immediately apparent. With online publicity, such distinctions have faded away, influencing printed paper. This is even more the case in the fashion business, where separation between editorials and publicity has never been very clear (Abnett 2015) and where a wide collaboration was soon established with fashion-bloggers and Instagram. Drawing on this blurring of distinctions, *Icon's* portrait of Pasolini is conceived as part of the magazine's 'continuum', where criticism, commemoration and publicity blend, confused by the prominence of idiosyncrasies, encouragement of personal choices, and the celebration of individual stance.

Fashion brands sell symbols of distinction to the millions. They make accessible what at a symbolic level is perceived as luxury, and

therefore unachievable (Thomas 2015). Such is the function of accessories: more available, ever-changing, conceived as glittering luxuries and yet the least expensive pieces among high brand’s lines of products. This is the case of eye-wear, so conspicuous in *Icon*’s photo-editorial and so iconic in Pasolini’s celebrity imagery. Ray-ban glasses and Paul Smith glasses are the most accessible articles displayed on *Icon*’s pages. Meaningfully, *Icon*’s editorial turns Pasolini’s glasses into sunglasses. Originally used «as part of an articulation of a dissonant style which held an attraction just as great as that of those sunny images of “straight” success and leisure», in the 1950s and 1960s sunglasses were appropriated by the mainstream, where they «could act as a sign of a “bettered self” – but also started to signify a glamorously “battered” mode of existence» (Brown 2015, p. 121). Pasolini’s sunglasses conjure an array of ambiguous social meanings, and even contradictions, although always revolving around “a project of singularity”.

Fashion brands bridge a few contradictions, resolving, for example, the tension between an idea of luxury and privilege – associated with fame – and an idea of the ordinary and accessible – reminiscent of purchasing power and consumption standards. Ultimately, the brands’ union of symbolic uniqueness and large-scale material replication epitomizes how celebrity «is constituted discursively», by the means – verbal, or visual – in which the individual is represented (Holmes and Redmond 2006, p. 12).

Conclusion

As Chris Rojeck maintains, a celebrity establishes him- or herself according to an extraordinary visibility and a strong grasp on the ordinary, reinforced by an emphasis on codes of accessibility.

Although God-like qualities are often attributed to celebrities, the modern meaning of the term celebrity actually derives from the fall of gods ... The increasing importance of the public face in everyday life is a consequence of public society, a society that cultivates personal style derives from the advent of a public society, a society that cultivates personal style as antidote to the democracy of formal equality. (Rojeck 2001, p. 9)

The cult of celebrity is the democratization of being visible. It expresses a world in which everybody can be conspicuous. Pasolini's celebrification encapsulates a contemporary form of Dandyism uncovering an extreme uneasiness with formal equality. This Dandyism transfigures timeworn class distinctions into a more indefinite self-awareness. The dandyism Pasolini inspires assumes a personal stance towards society, expressed through an eccentric, aloof style, whose attractiveness is the choice not to be prominent. The fashion model and the brands used in *Icon*'s photo-editorial therefore convey an exclusivity based on sober elegance, separateness, and intellectual honesty. Supposedly, the readers who enter this sphere of meaning identify with Pasolini's distinctive position, fascinated by the idea of being *connoisseurs* stepping outside mainstream style and trends. They are invited to embrace his overt combination of critical vision on consumption and nonchalant being *à la mode*.

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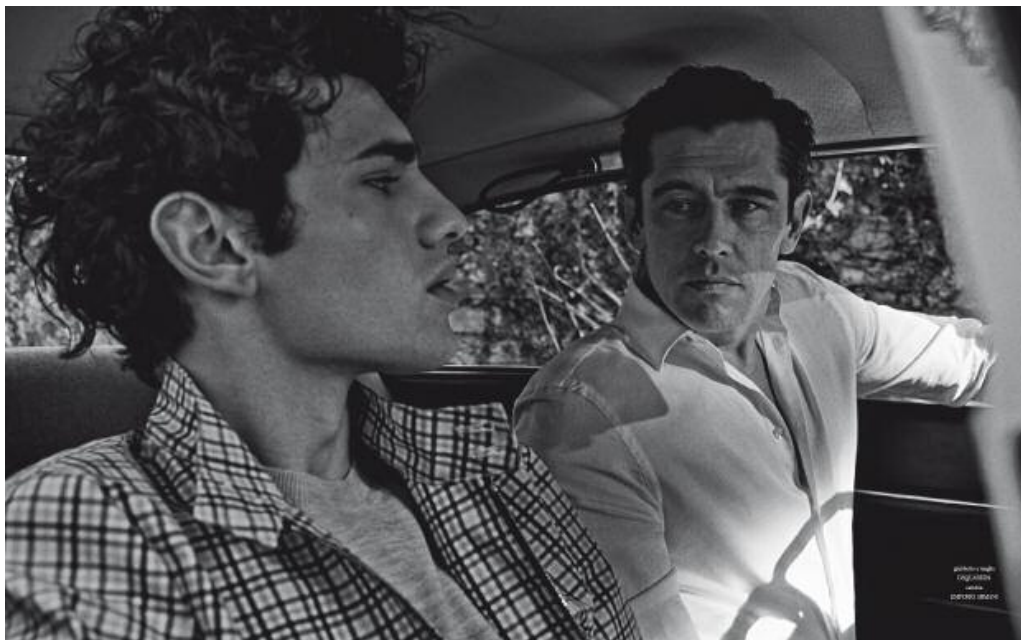
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Notebook 2016

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Courtesy of *Icon Magazine* (photographer: Michelangelo Di Battista, fashion editor: Andrea Tenerani).