14. The new Rococo: Sofia Coppola and fashions in contemporary femininity

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Light glows on the pale grey mules, enhancing their polished silk shine. Matte blue stockings provide contrast with the slippers. In the corner of the frame, there is a hint of salmon pink skirt being pulled up flirtatiously to admire this combination of colours and surfaces. Around the sitter, are various other shoes – scattered cast-offs that suggest repeated trying on, discarded and left to lie amongst the curving floral twists, which decorate the carpet. While the colours and styles evoke the mid-eighteenth-century Rococo, the shoes are too sleek and pointed, and a pair of powder blue Converse high top trainers assert that this is a contemporary stylisation. The scene uses the Rococo's light, frivolous mood, its femininity, rounded lines, and love of nature-inspired decoration, but it is resolutely modern; the mules are designed by Manolo Blahnik while the sneakers are a fashionable wardrobe staple, an ironic nod to American sportswear's ubiquity.

This scene from Sofia Coppola's film *Marie Antoinette* (2006) (see fig.14.1, p.296) suggests the ways that the director used history, not as a direct source, although the film follows the story of the queen's days at Versailles, but as a means to think about memory, femininity and feelings. Coppola achieved this through a series of images that produced a nostalgic montage, which is at once melancholy and pleasurable. Her films speak of adolescence, youth and the search for meaningful identity. Sofia Coppola's trilogy: *The Virgin suicides* (1999), *Lost in translation* (2003), and, finally, *Marie Antoinette* are dominated by themes of feminine subjectivity, and representations of both isolation and female friendship and bonding, often depicted through scenes of consuming fashion. These issues are played out in relation to identity, transition, adolescence and nostalgia. This essay argues that these elements combine within Coppola's films, as well as within a particular strand in contemporary fashion imagery and design, to suggest a 'new Rococo'. This is an aesthetic that at times explicitly evoked its eighteenth-century predecessor to construct an ideal of femininity that celebrates surface, frivolity and irony. It is not just stylistic though, as Melissa Hyde has written: 'Lately it has become possible to speak of the Rococo as a cultural mode

Figure 14.1: Film still, *Marie Antoinette*, dir. Sofia Coppola (2006). Photo: private collection.

of being, thought and representation rather than exclusively as a formal idiom.'[1] This complex of meanings is present in the millennial examples under discussion. They represent a reassertion of rococo ideals that is historically specific, and perhaps, as Deborah Fausch has suggested in relation to recent architecture, they thus embody a transitory mode: 'Like the Rococo, our own times are now post: post-industrial, post-structuralist, post-functionalist, post truth, post-authenticity, post-crisis, post-modernist, and even post-millennium. We are beyond modernism and even beyond post-modernism, in the same way that the Rococo was beyond the Renaissance and the Baroque.'[2]

The Rococo and new Rococo both deploy shimmering surfaces simultaneously to attract attention and deflect the scrutiny of prying eyes. Depth and meaning are disguised by distracting prettiness; a feminine trait that is both admired and dismissed by Western culture as trivial. However, such attitudes overlook its seductive power and ability, as this essay argues, to critique and deconstruct contemporary mores. Rosalind Galt's examination of prettiness in film suggests an interesting way to rethink such imagery: 'Might prettiness in cinema be uniquely able to develop a politics that engages gender, sexuality, and geographical alterity at a formal level rather than simply as a problem for representation?'[3] This essay will extend this question to examine its fashion and art historical significance. Importantly, it will show how prettiness as rendered in the rococo style enables artists and designers to explore emotions, through the surface's sensuality, and through play with history and memory.

The Rococo's key elements, and the new Rococo's rendition of these, can be summarised in two images, created at the high point of each manifestation of the style: François Boucher's 1756 portrait of the marquise de Pompadour from Munich's Alte Pinakothek (see fig.14.2, p.298) and Corinne Day's photograph *Kate's flat*, originally published in British *Vogue* in 2003. Each revels in contrasting combinations of pastel and deep hues, delicate feminine features, and intimate environments. Decorative surfaces, whether the frills on Pompadour's gown or the lace knickers that Moss wears, are contrasted with fields of drenched colour, and natural reference points are rendered artificial. Flowers symbolise femininity, yet their obvious artifice denies any essentialist view of gender, and asserts its performativity and playfulness. In mid-eighteenth-century Rococo, fantasy and romance were a lush, decadent drama of aristocratic excess. However, in the 1990s and early twenty-

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1.   Melissa Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, p.11.
2.   Deborah Fausch, 'Rococo modernism: the elegance of style', in *Perspecta* 32, *Resurfacing modernism* (2001), p.16.
3.   Rosalind Galt, *Pretty: film and the decorative image* (New York, 2011), p.6.

Figure 14.2: François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour* (1756), oil on canvas, Alte Pinatothek, Munich. © bpk, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Sammlung HypoVereinsbank, Member of UniCredit.

first century, it was tinged with melancholy and loss. The new Rococo was often played out against decaying backdrops that further exposed beauty's ephemeral nature.

As the 1990s wore on, fashion photography's use of realism evolved to integrate increasing elements of fantasy. By the early twenty-first century, a lighter atmosphere came to dominate certain photographers, such as the work of Corinne Day. Even though this *Vogue* editorial story was controversial at the time, it is possible to discern Day's pleasure in photographing Kate Moss. The image is about their friendship, Moss's youthful search for adult identity and a rococo love of serpentine lines, pale candy colours and decorative surfaces. Even the artificial references to natural idylls in eighteenth-century art are ironically evoked by the plastic glow of multi-coloured fairy lights, which are taped to the wall and form a proscenium around Moss's body. As Melanie Ward, a stylist who often worked with Day noted: 'We wanted to achieve an emotional response from the model, so there was something you related to as a person.'[4] Fashion photography's use of rococo styling provided just such an identification point. The soft colours and delicate lines of these images invited the viewer's gaze and reinforced feminine connections between artist, model and (visual) consumer. Their snapshot realism was mediated by delicacy and the creators' unashamed focus on femininity and prettiness.

This was not, however, a simple retreat into girlish colours and escapist nostalgia. The women who created these images had international fashion status, the models used were, at least in Moss's case, equally influential and global in their reach, and the consumers who bought labels such as Chloé needed cultural and economic capital to buy into these brands. The new Rococo, like its eighteenth-century predecessor, used femininity to express power and status. However, this was achieved in a manner that, at least on the surface, rejected the traditional attributes of a decadent elite: masculine, rational lines were replaced by soft curves, and hard, shiny surfaces overpowered by delicate layers. In neither case did this mean that the power was any less real.

In the new Rococo, nostalgia and historicism were used to connect women as makers and consumers, and to link with the audience. These connections were made through shared memories and collective ideals, expressed through references to the recent and distant past, and images that seemed real and achievable. Or as fashion journalist Harriet Quick wrote of Chloé's advertising and clothing: 'That image is an attainable fantasy: "You too could be that pretty girl".'[5] These clothes, and the

4.   Quoted in Charlotte Cotton (ed.), *Imperfect beauty: the making of contemporary fashion photography* (London, 2000), p.76.
5.   Harriet Quick, 'The Phoebe factor', *Observer Magazine* (29 May 2005).

imagery connected with the new Rococo suggested identity's fluidity. In this, they demonstrated their creators' and wearers' knowing use of imagery and clothing to mould and project a carefully crafted sense of self. Melissa Hyde has discussed the marquise de Pompadour as a 'self-made aristocrat', who was all too aware of imagery and self-styling as a key means for women to re-present themselves and shape others' perceptions.[6] The women involved in making the imagery and clothing discussed in this essay are equally conscious of its manipulative potential. The new Rococo was a way to reach out to consumers and draw them into a seemingly unthreatening world. It was a means to disarm the viewer, whether the magazine or cinema audience, and to ease consumption. However, it was also, potentially, a way for wearers of Chloé or similar labels to disarm those around them. Delicate, rococo clothing does not necessarily indicate personal fragility, but can show the wearer's confidence and lack of need for more forthright and obvious assertions of status and intent.

For Coppola, memory and identity are connected through imagery, in particular fashion photography and pop music. She wove together sights and sounds that recalled her own and many of her viewers' teenage years, from notebooks, scrawled with graffiti and kitsch stickers, to more grown-up collections of perfume bottles and mementoes, always grounded in the detailed materiality of dress and feminine ephemera. Layers of references and meanings were hidden under the imagery's surface: memories of teenage years and their intensity, emotion, vulnerability and sexuality. As K. K. Barrett, her set designer for *Marie Antoinette*, commented: 'She gave me tear sheets [...] Not period details, but contemporary images of pictures she liked or that she assumed a fourteen-year-old girl would appreciate [...] Colours, a pose, a photograph in soft focus [...] these were to be interpreted and decoded in feeling – not as direct reference.'[7] In this way, hers are fashion rather than costume films, since they relate to fashion advertising and editorial imagery's use of layered references to suggest mood and emotion, rather than to create accurate representations of the past. For Coppola, authenticity resides in the emotions expressed and evoked, rather than heritage films' focus on verisimilitude. Coppola, in common with the eighteenth-century rococo artists, used history to evoke memories and emotional responses, rather than to assert facts. This approach is playful and teases the viewer with ambiguity and feints, but her work also has the ability to seduce and connect with spectators, who can find common ground in her romantic tableaux.

6.   Melissa Hyde, 'The make-up of the marquise', p.457.
7.   K. K. Barrett, quoted in Allegra Donn, 'Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*', in *The Times* (7 October 2006).

Deborah Fausch has discussed the seemingly contradictory forces at play in contemporary architecture's use of the Rococo and her analysis is equally applicable to the films and fashion discussed here. Her comments on the interconnections between apparent binaries of modernism and realism versus Rococo and fantasy are central to Coppola's work. They also permeate the fashion imagery and ready-to-wear labels under analysis in this essay. What links these 'opposing philosophies' is, Fausch argues,

> the intelligence and wit, the sure grasp of the human, the attractive econ-omy, and the grace, charm and beauty possessed by the architecture of the Rococo. In particular, both the rococo period and our own are marked by a change in the relationship to nature and history. The Rococo stepped down from embodying divine nature that underwrote human action and hierarchy to mirroring the refinement of human nature.[8]

This shift in focus links with another important aspect of Coppola's work, along with the other examples discussed here, which is that they represent women making imagery, designing clothes, directing films, perhaps even constructing a feminine gaze that highlights the ways women enact feminine subjectivity both alone and with their peers. This work links women not just through consumption and pleasure, but also through business and creativity. It represents an aspect of feminin-ity, as projected by these women themselves. Eva Rueschmann described this shift towards a more nuanced understanding of the ways women directors and female-centred subjects can alter emphasis and meaning: 'In modern cinema, the gaze is not exclusively a form of masculine control and mastery (although it *can* be that); rather, the eye ("I") of the camera can serve as a locus for women's questioning and inquiring encounters with a multiplicity of female selves.'[9]

These directors, photographers and designers are knowing and aware of the camera's powerful eye. In Coppola's films a female character will sometimes look straight into the camera, and challenge the cinematic gaze to use the screen and the imagined (feminine) audience as a mirror and as reassurance. This suggests the ways identity is formed through both projection and assimilation, collaged together through references to peers and idols and combined with an interior sense of self.[10] This fluidity is acted out through close female associations; real, in terms of intense friendships and sisterly bonds, and imagined through scrutiny of fashion and popular cultural imagery. Jackie Stacey's comments on

8.   Fausch, 'Rococo modernism', p.16.
9.   Eva Rueschmann, *Sisters on the screen* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), p.11.
10. See the discussion of Paul Schilder's work in Rebecca Arnold, *The American look: fashion, sportswear and the image of women in 1930s and 1940s New York* (London, 2009), p.1-34.

women's experience of going to the cinema together in the 1940s and 1950s are apposite since they speak of the ways that this collective activity influenced women's self-perception: 'This sense of community and of togetherness clearly broke down feelings of isolation and offered a sense of self with a collective meaning. The "shared intimacy" and "heightened enjoyment" of collective consumption could be read as further contributing to the feminisation of cultural consumption: femininity being culturally constructed as relational and masculinity as more individuated.'[11] Her words also have resonance in fashion, both in terms of its visual and literal consumption. This is evident in girls' and women's often collective experience of, for example, shopping, getting ready to go out in the evening, trying on clothes and looking at magazines; all of which enable young women in particular to test their own and their peer group's sense of identity, beauty ideals and body image. This power derived through immersion in feminine culture, and collective understanding of how the new rococo style masks hidden meanings known only within the group.

Coppola's first film *The Virgin suicides* was based on Jeffrey Eugenides' 1993 novel, which, like the film, is set in mid-1970s Michigan and examined the Lisbon family of five sisters' powerful hold on their neighbourhood. From the start the audience knows that the girls are doomed, the film's title and opening sequence announces their fate. They are mythical creatures, formed by their intimacy and intensity. *The Virgin suicides* tells of the private fantasy world that adolescent girls construct, based upon shared fashion and music interests and talk of sex and love. In a scene near the start of the film, the girls are presented as an art historical tableau, united in grief at their youngest sister's suicide (see fig.14.3, p.303). Strewn on the floor, draped in white and pale blue jersey nightdresses and tee-shirts, their prone bodies are carefully composed to look like a painting, with the dull red of the bedspread pooling around their bodies like blood. Despite the tragic event that this image narrates, ultimately it is the eighteenth-century conversation piece, rather than history painting that the scene recalls. They lie within their teenage bedroom's claustrophobic confines; a pink plush teddy bear, pastel furniture and discarded clothes are the attributes of their status and their world's parameters.

The visual similarity of the pale, blonde Lisbon girls mimics the repetition of fashion imagery, where similar-looking models reinforce fashionable ideals. The power of the group and its replicated identity is reinforced through their collective image. It also protects each individ-

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11. Jackie Stacey, *Star gazing: Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship* (London and New York, 1994), p.101.

Figure 14.3: Film still, *The Virgin suicides*, dir. Sofia Coppola (1999). Photo: private collection.

ual, who is never alone, but is perceived as part of a unit, dressed similarly and defined by a cohesive look or style. From the start, the girls are dreamlike, and the youngest, Cecilia, embodies their pale looks and clothes. She always wears a vintage lace dress, at one point referred to as a 1920s wedding dress, seeming unreal, ghostly and uncanny, a spirit in the tree. She also evokes the replica's strangeness: sameness is both reassuring and disturbing. It blurs boundaries between real and fantasy, and individual and collective subjectivity.

The girls are introduced in slow motion, they are a fantasy of feminine power over the spectator, based on their collective style and unknowability. Eva Rueschmann has described the common sense of identity and identification in her discussion of depictions of sisters in films: 'Connected through memories and a common origin, sisters often reinforce their bonds through a kind of insider language and mutual play that grow out of their individual subjectivities; they also create shared space of fantasy that draws upon and is shaped by the cultural discourses that surround them.'[12] This unity is constructed and recalled in fashion and film imagery, but also acted out by girls and women shopping together and trying on and discussing clothes and fashion. The Lisbon sisters are aware of the impact they have on the watching boys, but as the film wears on, they are increasingly trapped within the domestic sphere, and this ultimately leads to their demise. Although the boys narrate the film and thus tell the story of the girls' lives, which creates issues about who is in control of their image, the strength of the girls' presence gives them an implicit victory. The girls ultimately orchestrate and stage their own deaths to escape, and are thus never forgotten, and as such enact a masochistic teenage fantasy.

Lost in translation, unlike the other films, is set in a city, and Coppola contrasts technology and anonymity with nature and history as represented by Japanese temples. In this film, the lethargy and ener-vation apparent in *The Virgin suicides* becomes a specific, explicit theme, expressed through the new rococo style that is transposed from sub-urban America to Tokyo's chaotic cityscape. The two main characters – Charlotte, played by Scarlett Johansson, and Bob, played by Bill Murray – are alienated from their lives and relationships, their senses dulled by jetlag. They are trapped between their hotel's sterile calm, the confusion of unfamiliar bustling streets and the impenetrable traditions of a culture they do not understand.

Charlotte is shown visiting Kyoto, dressed in a duffel coat and pale separates, a thickly knitted scarf wrapped around her neck (see fig.14.4, p.305). She hovers around the edges of a temple, quietly pacing around

12. Rueschmann, *Sisters on the screen*, p.100-101.

Figure 14.4: Film still, *Lost in translation*, dir. Sofia Coppola (2003). Photo: private collection.

the cultivated gardens in white sneakers. As before, nature is contained and controlled, shaped into aestheticised, man-made environments. She is shot as both a *Nouvelle Vague* heroine, her clothes by preppy French label APC, and as a Boucher coquette; her pale skin, and voluptuous pink lips set against flowers and nature or contrasted with her hotel bedroom, and framed by rumpled sheets as she reclines on her bed. She is shown in private moments, her bed linen's drapery emphasising her semi-clad figure, as she struggles with her own isolation and feelings of alienation. Although Western and privileged, the new Rococo lacks the certainty and reassurance of its aristocratic predecessor. In this film, as in *Marie Antoinette*, nature is denoted as feminine, but as in rococo art, it is always man-made. This imagery speaks of Coppola's use of fashion photography to shape her aesthetic, just as she and other designers and filmmakers use paintings to inform their evocations of the past. She evokes the work of 1970s photographers such as Sarah Moon and Deborah Turbeville, whose imagery also spoke of feminine subjectivity and intimacy.

Coppola is also inspired by William Eggleston's imagery, and Coppola states, 'It was the beauty of banal detail that was inspirational'.[13] She also harks to Guy Bourdin in the sudden, saturated colour of certain elements, for example, the too-green grass that threatens to engulf the women strewn across its surface in both *The Virgin suicides* and *Marie Antoinette*. Coppola layers her references, in order to recall collective memories of women growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. She read French *Vogue* in her teens and her films, like contemporary fashion photography, are steeped in noirish film narratives and played out in double-page spreads and photo shoots. Her approach mirrors fashion time, it loops back and doubles up period influences.[14] Her films recall 1970s and 1980s music, photography and fashion, her own memories of these and young girls' understanding of these periods, which are being reinterpreted by contemporary fashion. History and memory become lenses through which to understand her identity-formation. Her films represent an 'auto-ethnography'. They analyse her search for identity, and feelings of being disconnected and lonely, despite or perhaps because of her privileged background. Film critics often conflate Coppola's lifestyle and experiences with those of her protagonists. They comment on her stylish clothes, and wistful demeanour. However, as with the new Rococo style that her films promote, there is strength and depth of purpose beneath her apparently delicate exterior, and as Sean O'Hagan wrote in 2006: 'So far she has succeeded on her own terms and in her quietly confident way, defining some kind of hazy-youth cultural

13. Sofia Coppola quoted in Sean O'Hagan, 'Out of the ordinary', *The Observer* (25 July 2004).
14. See Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the edge: spectacle, modernity and deathliness* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2003), p.9-14.

drift, the somnambulance of a generation raised on style, ironic pastiche and disengagement.'[15] She explored her own development of a visual sensibility in relation to life stages and key events, and feelings and emotions through her reference points, and choice of subject matter.

Marie Antoinette makes explicit the relationship of contemporary femininity to rococo templates. The film is a stylisation, focused on fashion rather than costume. It is, in the film's star Kirsten Dunst's words, 'a history of feelings [...] rather than a history of facts'.[16] It plays upon many of the same themes as Coppola's other films: a young girl in a situation beyond her control. It shows the main character dealing with transition and ambiguity. Femininity is posited as a means of escape from self and situation. As in her previous work, there is little dialogue but mood and atmosphere are emphasised. It evokes ideas and feelings through surface, and suggests what lies beneath. Based on Antonia Fraser's book *Marie-Antoinette: the journey* (2002), Coppola's rendition of the myth of Marie-Antoinette encompasses her contradictory status as confused teenager and 'wicked queen', seen through the lens of 1980s New Romantic imagery. The film depicts Marie-Antoinette's transition from life in Austria to her arrival at Versailles to marry the dauphin and her years at court there, and ends with the royal family's forced return to Paris during the Revolution.[17] Coppola contrasts obviously parodic depictions of the young queen, swathed in pastel silks and casually gorging on delicate, bite-size *macarons* with more conventional costume depictions of 'real' events from Marie-Antoinette's life, such as her arrival at Versailles, where she is shown in demure powder blue. This twin representation is used to emphasise the power and longevity of both real and imagined biographies. As with other historical films, paintings provide inspiration for the costumes. However, there is no pretence at authenticity, instead fashion is presented as masquerade and identity; it is, to adapt Melissa Hyde's reading of Boucher's work, 'made up'. Indeed, the licence taken with the film's costumes mirrors the approach of many eighteenth-century artists, including Boucher and Fragonard, who themselves edited the reality of contemporary dress to construct their own and their sitters' aesthetic ideals.

Thus, the theatrical, dressing-up box style of New Romantics, which the film deploys in both costume and soundtrack, is as important a source as the eighteenth century. Adam Ant was used as a template for Baron Fersen's costuming and his signature white stripe is suggested by Marie-Antoinette's skinny, black net eye-mask. This suggests that all fashion,

15. Sean O'Hagan, 'Sofia Coppola', *The Observer* (8 October 2006).
16. Kirsten Dunst quoted in, O'Hagan, 'Sofia Coppola'.
17. Coppola was granted rare access to the Chateau de Versailles and many major scenes, including those in Marie-Antoinette's bedchamber, were filmed there.

and indeed identity, is masquerade. Dress, costume and fashion are presented as playful and fluid; able to be made and remade in line with contemporary mores and individual tastes at the eighteenth-century court, at the Blitz Club in 1980s Camden, and, it is suggested, in twenty-first century life. Coppola is like a fashion designer, she can combine and merge references and make sense of them through the coherence of her own aesthetic. Art, fashion and music are there to be plundered and reformed into an utopian escape from reality: a *Voyage to Cythera*. However, the film's light prettiness should not be dismissed as mere decoration, since as Rosalind Galt notes: 'Unlike much writing on decorative commodity cultures, this discourse on the historical objecthood of the female body strikingly refuses to blame the woman for her out-of-control consumption. Coppola's revisionism [links] the politically rejected female body with the disprized decorative image [and] astutely diagnoses the stakes of contemporary film style.'[18]

The director's empathy with her characters and carefully planned *mise en scène* bring depth to her subjects and connect film, fashion and art. Passages of the film mirror the rhythm of fashion magazines, longer sections are slowly paced, then interspersed with short, quick cuts like a music video. When the main characters abandon Versailles's claustrophobic atmosphere one night to attend a masked ball, the film's two visual themes are united: the eighteenth-century masquerade ball has Siouxsie and the Banshees' 1978 debut single *Hong Kong garden* as its soundtrack. The costumes combine authentic detailing of both periods, to emphasise fashion's ability to transform and disguise the wearer. The scene is shot with handheld camerawork in places to emphasise the chaos and excitement of the party. As in so much of the film, Marie-Antoinette is shown gaining confidence, solace and validation through activities with her female friends, in this case the duchesse de Polignac, played by Rose Byrne. Her costume fuses New Romantic elements with references to Gainsborough's 1780s portrait of the duchess of Richmond. Friendship enables Marie-Antoinette to retreat into protective, feminine company. Her peers mirror each other in looks, style and behaviour and therefore reinforce their sense of validity. The film shows her escapes into excess and decadence and, importantly, reforming her identity through dress, with the idea that she is both creator of and created through fashion.

A key theme within Coppola's films, and of this essay, is the representation of women in film and fashion and the ways these media construct femininity in both a pleasurable and problematic way. The new rococo style lends itself to these preoccupations, since it recalls eighteenth-

18. Galt, *Pretty*, p.22.

century precursors, such as Boucher's *Milliner* (1746) from the *Four times of day*, with its emphasis on consumption, femininity and pleasure. There is also important consideration of cultural consumption as a group activity. Emphasis is placed on female bonding and sharing, with twists of fabric, piles of accessories and dressing up and trying on clothes, creating visual and material links between her female characters. As is evident in Coppola's work, this feeling of shared happiness and togetherness can sometimes be more keenly felt in retrospect. Looking back at high-school friendship groups, or the collective lives of young sisters, such bonding activities provide a nostalgic vision of unity and potential, played out in the security of girls' bedrooms or fashion store changing rooms, that has been lost in adulthood. Jackie Stacey's findings from interviews with female cinema-goers in the 1940s and 1950s reinforces this view. She emphasises that '[gender] offers an interesting lens through which to analyse the pleasures of the utopian feelings of "community" remembered by these female spectators'.[19]

While Coppola is fascinated by remembered details of her youth, her aesthetic is closer to the romantic escape of rococo style than the harsh light of realism. While her imagery can appear natural, bathed in sunlight and soft colours, it is always controlled, and aware of its status as representation rather than truth. What matters to her is that the feelings and emotions she evokes in her films resonate with her audience. As one critic wrote of her first film, 'It is lovely to look at and unsettling to know, a transference of pain. As you sit there, your own memories come flooding back [...] I was meant to remember, invited to look back.'[20] This focus on sensual and emotional truths can also be seen in eight-eenth-century examples of the Rococo, where artists such as Boucher use rich brushwork and colour to enhance the viewer's sensation of looking as a precursor to tactile pleasures represented by the artists' focus on flesh and fabric to provoke emotion and memory.

The trope of friendship and sisterly comradeship seen in Coppola's films is familiar in art. She evokes the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideal of feminine companionship. This has contemporary res-onance, as noted by Graham Allan in his study of the nature of friendship and gender, since, 'Not only do our friends help to provide us with our sense of identity, but they also confirm our social worth'.[21] He argues that girls have fewer but more intense friendships, based on emotion and expressiveness. Allan asserts that male friendships are based more upon activities. However, this is also true of girls' friendships, it is just that their

19. Stacey, *Star gazing*, p.101.
20. Peter Preston, 'Death and the maiden', *The Observer* (21 May 2000).
21. Graham Allan, *Friendship: developing a sociological perspective* (New York and London, 1989), p.1.

activities are often more private or are not deemed active, such as shopping, talking and dressing up. For Coppola and her peers, these became core themes in their work and in their creation of imagery and clothing that used new rococo styling to connect with their generation's collective memories of youth and friendship.

Coppola's construction of a feminine ideal, in common with that of fashion photographers, fashion designers such as Phoebe Philo and Stella McCartney, and mass-market brands such as Topshop, played with new rococo themes. Their imagery was infused with an ironic frivolity, and showed femininity in relation to a curving line of beauty that focused on decoration and surface. These constructions emphasised fashion's role as escape, pleasure and disguise. These ideas are used in fashion advertising – which in the early twenty-first century frequently commodified this notion of friendship in relation to consumption. Shopping was depicted as a means to reinforce friendship; to act out a relationship, and rehearse similarities and identities. Also, to define differences through self-styling and playful dressing up. This refers to childhood dressing up and trying on identities, and to psychological formation of self-image and subjectivity. Melanie L. Mauthner has commented on the way subjectivity is rooted in women's experiences of close friendship and sisterly relationships, and argues that emotions are 'sources of knowledge'. She describes female friendship as taking place in 'private cultures', and I would argue that these include fashion practices.[22]

Chloé is a brand built on this idea of empathetic, and importantly supportive and pleasurable, female friendship. This was evident in its advertising, such as the 2005 campaign, which featured two blonde models seemingly on a night out together. Their clothing combined silks cut into soft, pyjama-style jackets or ruched over the bust in ice blue dresses, edged with crystal beading to emphasise the skin revealed. The models were shown in close connection, leaning into each other, in semi-embrace. This twinning and correspondence is repeated in much of the brand's advertising and reinforced its location of femininity within friendship and mirrored identity. This emphasis was furthered in press coverage about Phoebe Philo and Stella McCartney when they designed for the label in the early twenty-first century, which constantly spoke of their friendship and interaction as central to their creativity and style. Publicity also reinforced the idea that they embodied their own customer and that a group of women collaborated to produce these clothes. In one interview Philo commented that: 'I really find it helpful working with other women and doing fittings together, because you really look at

22. Melanie L. Mauthner, *Sistering power and change in female relationships* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), p.10, 13.

each other and say "would you wear it like that? Do you want that to fall on that part of your hip or a little lower?". We all try on the clothes.'[23] This connects design practice to consuming and wearing fashion, demystifying the process and relating it to what friends do when getting ready to go out, for example, which again hark back to eighteenth-century images of women at their toilette or choosing ribbons from milliners.

The idea of the power of peer groups and feminine collaboration and friendship was encapsulated in Corinne Day's relationship with Kate Moss. The harsh realism of earlier 1990s imagery was countered by Day and Juergen Teller's happier, lighter, more romantic evocation of femininity. Teller also sought to find something within a model beyond her fashion image and artificial poses. Both photographers therefore emphasise relationships and collaboration in their imagery's creation. Day's photo spread *24 carat Kate*, from British *Vogue*'s December 2000 edition, again used the photographer and model's relationship to lend intimacy to the images. In one shot, Moss is shown in white bra and knickers, worn with vintage Vivienne Westwood boots. Moss's pose, leaning forward, legs crossed on a little gold-legged stool diffuses the potential stuffiness of the scene. She is shown laughing, clutching a sandwich in one hand, as sunlight streams in from the gap in the voluminous rose-pink curtains that form a rococo sweep behind her. Teller's shoot for the same magazine three years later is equally irreverent. Models in delicate, new rococo cocktail dresses line up in front of a football goal. The muddy pitch and incongruity of their delicate shoes is deployed to undercut the magazine's lofty reputation. These photographs are typical of the contemporary new rococo mood. They show humour, femininity and combinations of new and vintage clothes and accessories as pleasurable and personal. The aesthetic is unified, and yet they indicate the importance of personalisation and individual expression. In this they mimic the eighteenth-century Rococo's combination of historical and contemporary, real and fantasy, and the proto-modern emphasis on self-styling as a means to construct identity.

This balance is apparent in the way Coppola herself was depicted. In *Vogue*'s March 2000 edition, Corinne Day photographed her in knickers and vest crouched on the floor amidst the detritus of her hotel room: surrounded by half-open bags, laptop connector cords and wet towels, seemingly caught unawares by the photographer. Another image showed her made-up, lying on a bed in a creamy semi-opaque dress; the imagery's style a direct quotation from Day's fashion work. Juergen

23. Phoebe Philo quoted in Sarah Mower, 'Moll made good', *The Telegraph magazine* (30 November 2002).

Teller's images of Coppola for Marc Jacobs' advertisements for the 'Sofia' bag united similar themes of snapshot realism, new rococo femininity and irony. The boundaries between private and authentic self, and public and artificially constructed self, were constantly blurred. The spectator, as in the film and fashion discussed, is invited to identify and empathise and to feel connected to the women presented in the imagery and therefore to construct a relationship, real or imagined, between makers and wearers through the practice of fashion, both in terms of designing and consuming it.

   Aileen Ribeiro described the characteristics of eighteenth-century rococo style in dress as 'wit and fantasy [with] playful ornamentation, asymmetry and three-dimensional decoration'.[24] As is clear in the examples discussed in this essay, these elements have become entwined within contemporary film and fashion imagery to construct modern ideals of beauty and femininity that speak of fashion's ability to create rich evocations of history, memory and escape. This is not 'mere' style, it is ripe with meaning, emotion and longing. As Coppola herself says, 'You're considered superficial and silly if you're interested in fashion [...] But I think you can be substantial and still interested in frivolity.'[25] Indeed, surface can be just as, if not more, meaningful in its sleights of hand, although the correct cultural capital is needed to explore its hidden depths. It is also necessary to embrace its pleasures and recognise that these do not preclude intelligence and emotional authenticity. Coppola's is an insider's view of fashion, as both producer and consumer and, as in sub-cultural dress, and the eighteenth-century Rococo, style is used as a source of power and identity. It can include those knowledge-able enough to read its hidden messages and delight in the pleasures of shared aesthetics, and exclude and confuse those outside its domain.

24. Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of dress: fashion in England and France 1750-1820* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1997), p.53.
25. Sofia Coppola quoted in Kennedy Fraser, 'Teen queen', American *Vogue* (September 2006).