Fashion Models as Ideal Embodiments of Normative Identity

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This paper examines fashion models as gender myths and cultural icons through a cultural history of modelling. It reveals the construction of models' personas by the successive addition of meaningful signs: physique, manner, attitude, nationality, class, race, salary, chamaleonism, slenderness, and so on. The author argues that models' glamour expresses economic and social power and promotes the values of consumerism, while exporting cultural ideals through visual neo-colonialism. On the basis of empirical material on models' experiences gathered from interviews, second oral sources and autobiographical material, the author approaches models' bodies, identities and public personas as artefacts performed through the reiteration of collectively defined gender standards and practices. This approach overcomes the contrast cast in fashion discourse between visibility/invisibility, private/public, real/unreal while disclosing the hegemonic beauty standards as fiction.

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Only with great difficulty does (the human mind)
come to understand itself by means of reflection.

Vico quoted in Finkelstein, 1991, p. 163

OVERTURE*

It was the need to understand my personal experience as a professional model that prompted my interest in fashion modelling as a cultural phenomenon. Starting at seventeen, I worked as a model and a mannequin in advertising and fashion for about six years. One of the experiences that struck me most during that time was the fascination I exerted over other people who, without knowing me, seemed mesmerized merely by my appearance. As a young woman who valued herself for more than her looks, I became myself spellbound by their fascination. I knew I could "switch on my allure"[1] while modelling in front of the cameras or in the catwalk, but the spell seemed to be cast even when I was not making any effort to perform it, in daily life circumstances, with plain clothes, no make-up and no setting. It seemed as if people were "seeing" and reacting to something other than my looks, but... what was it?

Trying to understand modelling as a cultural phenomenon and, thus, to spell out my spell-casting effect, were the driving questions that, some years later, prompted me to look back into modelling from a scholarly approach. I have drawn from my own experience as one more case study to further the understanding of modelling as a cultural phenomenon. My aim is to research the social context of my experience in order to connect the personal and the cultural —a central principle of autoethnography.[2]

On the basis of empirical material gathered from professional models and my own experience, I will present some reflections on female fashion and advertising models as performers of role models

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* An earlier version of this paper entitled "Modelling Femininity" was published in *Spectacular Women*, a special issue of the *European Journal of Women Studies*, Sage, 11(3), 2004, London, p. 309-326.

[1] I owe this expression to informant ex-model Cristina Carrasco.

[2] However, I would like to clarify that I do not privilege my modelling experience as a case that can be universalised to explain other models' experiences. Hence, although the choice of topic and the research lines have been guided by my own views, I do not concur in the problematic *exclusive* use of the self as source of qualitative research data (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Picture 1. Advert for Norma Kamali. Model: Yasmeen Ghauri. This picture captures quite graphically the use of women as vessels for ideology: "In dreams, a writing tablet signifies a woman, since it receives the imprint of all kinds of letters" (Artemidorus, quoted in Warner, 1985: 3).

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for female identity and, more generally, as symbolic containers of cultural values (picture 1). From an intersectional approach I will examine the evolution of hegemonic beauty standards as mechanisms defining and regulating gender, class and race identity. The starting question is: what cultural values are embodied by models?

To answer it, in the first section of the paper I will present a cultural history of modelling paying particular attention to the construction of models' public personas through the addition of layers of meaning: class, race, nationality and so on. In doing so I will approach the study of model's bodies as "natural symbols" (Douglas, 1994), a notion widely used in interdisciplinary gender studies (see, for instance, Warner, 1985). I will assume a notion of the body as an artefact resulting from the performative reiteration of collectively defined identity norms performed by each individual subject (Butler, 1990; Soley-Beltran, 2001). Thus, the body is taken as a sign of personal and social identity, a key to understanding the links between individuals and hegemonic definitions of identity, that is, between subjects and social institutions. Learning to control the appearance of one's body is the first lesson in the social school of symbolic embo-

diment of acceptable identity and behaviour. Therefore, I expect that the historical review on the construction of the social prestige of female models will reveal the cultural values underlying such embodiment.[3]

In the second section of the paper I will deal with the cultural values embodied by models and their relation to power and glamour. I will also consider the performative power that professional modelling practices have on models themselves. I will do so from the first person perspective of several professional models, as revealed in empirical data gathered from several sources: in-depth interviews conducted with ex-models as part of my postdoctoral research, published second oral sources and my own experience.

I hope my work will contribute to the incorporation into women's studies of an influential group of women who have as yet not been seriously considered. While avoiding the oversimplifying confusion of the person with the role s/he plays, my approach wants to escape approaching women who work as models either as the victims of the hegemonic gender definitions or as its censurable promoters.

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF MODELLING: FROM WAX-DUMMIES TO "REAL PEOPLE"

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> La beauté n'est que la promesse du bonheur.
>
> Stendhal, *De l'Amour*

Fashion modelling may have started in mid-nineteenth century in Paris with Marie Vernet. Although house models had occasionally been used to show clothes in the house of Gagelin, Marie Vernet, a sales assistant married to dressmaker Charles Worth, is considered the first known fashion model. Since 1852, when Madame Worth very successfully sported her husband's crinolines amongst the Paris aristocracy, the use of living models or *mannequins*, has not ceased to increase.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Lady Duff Gordon, owner of the dressmaking establishment "Lucille", started to use women of poor origins whom she would groom and hire. She transformed the showroom into a little theatre and used

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[3] For reasons of space and scope, in my brief historical review I do not consider artists' models nor do I look into the history of male models.

background live music for the first time.[4] Some models became celebrities, such as Sumurun or Dawn and Gloria, the stars of the Selfridges's fashion shows. In spite of their fame, models were not received in polite society since mannequins were considered menials. To make ends meet, most of them were "looked after" by men (Sumurun, quoted in Keenan, 1977: 113).

This started to change in 1924, when Jean Patou, in order to enhance his sales on America, carefully selected white US women to model his clothes, so his North-American clients could identify more easily with his designs. Patou's selling strategy imbued models with a new significance: nationality. This new treat elevated the status of modelling and contributed to make it into a socially acceptable profession. The opening of the first model agencies in the US and London reinforced its acceptability and attracted socialites to the profession through modelling schools, which also aimed to teach debutantes social skills and beauty tricks.

Models' types were also evolving. Patou's American models were tall and slender but not all designers used "statuesque" model girls. Cristobal Balenciaga showed his clothes on "short, stocky women" (Lucille, quoted in Steele, 1985: 218) whose shapes were closer to the looks of his French *couture* clients. In contrast, during the II World War, the demand was for a more ordinary and cheerful type of girl. In times of austerity, the "accessibility" of the dresses and encouraging smiles were the qualities the model was asked to represent.

In 1947, Christian Dior launched *The New Look* in his Paris *salon* and set fashion back into extravagance and away from practicality. The use of high heels, meters of cloth in the skirts, etc., immediately identified Dior's style with wealth and caused problems for his clients and models. In March 1947, during a photographic session in a Montmartre market, Dior's clothes scandalized the crowd suffering poverty, and a group of women beat a model and tore her clothes off (Beevor & Cooper, 1994). Nevertheless, Dior's *New Look* went ahead, and the distinction it aimed to mark demanded a new style of personality: a world-wise, sophisticated woman in her mid-thirties with a self assured look. Soon, the twelve top models in New York looked like Dior's standard type: haughty eyebrows and glossy groomed hair.

In 1954 Chanel presented her "Total Look", a compound of innovative design and a relaxed attitude that evoked leisure and

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[4] For a review of the history of fashion shows see Evans, 2001.

that was clearly differentiated from Dior's style. Consequently, Chanel's clothes were modelled on a different type of women. Chanel used herself and her family members as models. Her mannequins, often young aristocrats who modelled for prestige, were styled on the looks and attitudes of the designer when younger.

In the late fifties, Dior caused another outrage when essaying a new modelling strategy: to hire a dark, petite and inexperienced model called Victoire. The rich Right Bank clientele of the house of Dior considered her "little Left Bank look" (Dior quoted in Keenan 1977: 121) as an insult, but, when Dior used her again the following year, the audience were enthusiastic and called her "the very spirit of youth" (*ibid.*, 121). Victoire's body was Dior's attempt to symbolise the times: the rising importance of a new class of clients for the ready-to-wear (*prêt-à-porter*) industry. Thus, by using a model whose looks did not correspond to high society, Dior's strategy revealed a treat in models' symbolism that had not been stated so far: social class.

As mass production of the ready-to-wear was based on standard sizes, it required models whose measures would fit the sample collection used for shows and photographed for magazines or catalogues. Thus, as made-to-measure clothes were replaced by mass-produced ones, conforming to ready-made patterns became an increasingly important requirement for models, hence initiating the process of the homogeneity of the ideal body type. Other relevant changes taking place in the sixties concerned technical developments that made possible the reproduction of fashion photography in newsprints, which together with magazines, became ubiquitous shop windows that allowed women from outside society circles to know what was fashionable. The demand for photographic models increased, and the attitude towards models radically changed: modelling begun to be equated with business; models and photographers became the new elite of beautiful people as well as the heroes of several celebrated films.

Different types of beauties were required to market ready-to-wear for the middle and popular classes. Hence, the classy, aloof and lady-like attitude of models gave way to a more sexy, friendly and relaxed disposition and "... girls who exaggerate the realness of themselves, not their haughty unrealness like the couture models do" were on demand (Mary Quant, quoted in Keenan, 1977: 127). Jean Shrimpton was the first of the new "natural" models of the sixties and a middle-class ideal: "I embodied ordinariness-which is, of course, a hugely marketable quality" (Shrimpton, quoted in Craik, 1994: 105). In 1966, Twiggy, the "cockney kid" and the first model

whose public persona was explicitly characterised by having popu-
lar origins, embodied "innocence and image of youth" (Twiggy,
quoted in Craik, 1994: 84).

However, the ordinary 'girl-next-door' look co-existed with
more exotic styles embodied by women like Veruschka and
Donyale Luna, the favourite models of *Vogue* and *Harpers Bazaar*
respectively. Both were eccentric types in so far as they did not
belong to the middle classes: Veruschka was an unusual German
countess, and Donyale Luna was a black woman. Although black
models were starting to be used in the sixties, they featured only as
"exotic" types: "there was no room for the average-looking girl... If
you were black you had to be beautiful and stunningly confident"
(model agent Marshall, 1978: 114).

The economic depression of the seventies brought a more
sober fashion and tougher looks to accompany it: models' perfor-
mances became closer to fifties' haughtiness and aloofness than to
the sweeter style of the sixties. For the first time and, arguably, not
by coincidence, during the economic recession, models' fees became
incorporated into the advertising campaign of the product they were
endorsing. Lauren Hutton, described by famous agent Eileen Ford as
the "humane face" (Ford, quoted in Hartman, 1980: 77) because of
her irregular features, became, in 1973, the most highly paid model
in history: $200,000 for twenty days of work a year. The "humane
face" sold millions of beauty treatments partly by symbolising the
guaranteed fulfilment of the material needs humans are bound by.
Hutton was followed by Margaux Hemingway who famously got a
one-million-dollar contract to promote a new perfume in 1976. To
be able to "look like a million dollars" became paramount during the
economic recession. The trend accelerated in the 80s and had its
peak with the appearance of the Supermodel phenomena.

The required models' personalities and body types continued
to reflect the social context. The late seventies and early eighties' eco-
nomic buoyancy led to a demand for models who could display great
"energy" and sense of "fun". A variety of looks co-existed: from
boyish, to "pretty babies", to full-figured women. The increasing
numbers of American costumers for European fa-shion brought the
"Californian look" ("natural", tanned, healthy) into great demand in
the male and female modelling market. Fashion increasingly became
a global business, and advertising spread to attract larger markets.

Once again, the appearance of the very high model's fees, the
Supermodel phenomenon, coincided with the worldwide recession at
the end of the 80s. Supermodels became "famous consumption

objects" (model Veronica Webb, quoted in Elgort, 1994, not numbered) whose extraordinary salaries became an inseparable part of their image. In 1994, the Corsa Vauxhall campaign "The Supermodel" featuring five Supermodels was presented as the most expensive campaign in the history of British advertising because of their fees: "it's actually part of the mythology that surrounds the Supermodels... And it reflected superbly on us" (Stephenson-Wright, responsible for the campaign quoted in Jones, 1993 :151-2). Indeed, Supermodels were so expensive that they became a status-sign among designers. Valentino placed a $25,000 full-page advertisement in the paper with a picture of three Supermodels parading at his show to refute the rumour that he was not able to pay their wages (Blanchard, 1995: 9). Supermodels' popularity rose so much that they became "far more important that even the collections" (Jones, 1993: 11). But why such hype?

In a moment of economic insecurity, the Supermodels were reliable sales tools, "a safe bet" (fashion bookings editor at British Vogue Mathews quoted in Rudolph, 1991: 6) and a marketing strategy since "for an unknown company, you show the world that small as you are, you have the twenty thousand dollars (to hire a supermodel)" (model agent Galdi, quoted in Gross, 1996: 463).

Moreover, supermodels were a proven commodity for they represented a "global ideal" (Jones, 1993: 164) of beauty, used by Western companies to target an international community: for instance, Linda Evangelista and Christy Turlington sold Chanel to twenty-three countries; and Isabella Rosellini sold Lancome all over the world. Obviously this global ideal entails uniformity of beauty standards since the preferred looks are those of the white population in the richest countries: "despite a trend toward ethnic looks... in every country, blonde hair and blue eyes sell" (Chris Owen, director of British agency *Elite Premier*, quoted in Rudolph, 1991: 64).

Supermodels as a marketing strategy involved a sort of visual neo-colonialism in so far as in Europe and the US a model belonging to any race other than white does not get the same amount of advertising assignments or cosmetic contracts as white models, not even black Supermodel Naomi Campbell (Hudson, 1994: 8). Most of the minority models model "exotic/ethnic" fashion or tend to be featured in one of only four roles: musician, athlete, celebrity or object of pity (Jones, 1993: 14-5) —this still being particularly true of black models. Although this trend has started to change, and a number of magazines are now addressing non-white female audiences thus attempting to construct positive constructions of black and hispanic women, as Helcké notes "posi-

tive constructions of black femininity are systematically subverted by the inescapable commercial ties that these profit-making ventures (fashion magazines) have" (Helcké, 2003: 12).[5]

The model as a "celebrated commodity" (Bellafante, 1995: 65) is a product of the mass-marketing of fashion that started in the late seventies and early eighties. Designers' licenses brought moderately priced clothes to the market and increased the models' exposure to the public through street ads targeting a wider audience. The growth of media attention towards the fashion world fostered a second wave of interest in fashion on a scale comparable to that of the dailies in the late fifties. "Style conscious" international channels like CNN or MTV brought fashion "into living rooms in Atlanta" where "people don't even need to buy $5 fashion magazines anymore" (black top model and writer Webb, quoted in Bellafante, 1995: 65). As a consequence, modelling became a flourishing business and a cultural phenomenon of growing importance. Models have even become a referent for eroticism: not only a number of prostitution ads describe sexual workers as "models", they have even replaced the famous Playboy "bunnies" (Spanish *Playboy*'s entitles its 2003 July issue "The 99 Sexiest Models").

Concerning the evolving beauty standards, the 90s economic crisis coincided with the displacement of the "natural healthy looks" and the arrival of the "moda povera" look, the *waif*, the *grunge* style and its *blasé* attitude. However, the high glamour of the Supermodel system lingered. Most famously, Kate Moss' "super-real" body made her into an icon of the anti-fashion statement that fashion was keen to espouse. She was the only model since Twiggy to incorporate her working class background into her image. According to photographer and mentor Corinne Day, Moss' minimal body epitomised the "honesty" naturalness, cleanliness, ingenuousness that the nineties are demanding after the "high artifice" of the eighties (Day interviewed in *Tatler*, 1993: 30).

The trend spread, so Spanish magazine *Telva* echoed: "everything is now ingenuous and clean... Girls, not women are the healthy aspect of the 90s" (*Telva*, 1994: 86, my translation).

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[5] The spreading and reception of Western beauty standards and its accompanying gender and cultural ideals could be fruitfully studied by examining the development of beauty contests as commercial and recruitment strategies in emerging markets, such as Eastern Europe. The failed World Beauty Contest organised in Nigeria in 2003 provides a tragic example of such events.

Arguably, young girls are healthy since, as children, they have not yet been exposed to sex and drugs, and thus they are AIDS-safe. As a consequence of this new "taste" for younger looks, the age for starting a modelling career fell and fourteen-year-old models are not uncommon.

In the mid 90s, other trends developed in fashion modelling, such as using older models "with more meaningful lives" (Irvine, 1994: 11), models with "unusual" features (*Elle*, Sept. 1993; Jeal, 1994), or "real people" (Dudgeon, 1994: 15). Often, these "more real" models are professional models or actors hired from agencies like "Real People" in London. Calvin Klein, for instance, claimed that "what is real is beautiful" (Klein, quoted in Irvine, 1994: 11) since allegedly, perfect looks can be achieved through plastic surgery. Thus, since "perfection" became homogenized "it's no longer couture; it's middle-market look", as a consequence, "the unevenness of individual beauty adds value" (*ibid.*, 12).

These trends partly functioned as strategies to avoid Supermodels' fees and fame, which were said to be eclipsing the clothes. At the time, all the "style gurus" agree that the trends for real, ordinary" people is "just a revolution in fashion's cycle of reversals" (*ibid.*, 12).[6] Nowadays, apart from some renowned names, fees have gone down dramatically, and "real people" is now a term regularly used in models' agencies to refer to persons with no particular striking features who are often employed in advertising and underpaid, but who have not at all displaced the use of tall slender models. Not only are a number of the Supermodels still active, but new supermodels have also appeared, such as Gisele Bündchen or Karolina Kurkova, to name only a few.

In sum, although the exposure of top models is now lower than in the 80s, the Supermodel phenomena succeeded in raising models' prestige as a strategy supporting the spread of women's fashion and beauty standards worldwide. The appearance of Supermodels as the new celebrities and the "luxury boom" (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2004) in the 80s came together with an increase in the power of fashion as a normative authority. Coinciding

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[6] The fashion system is renowned for its ability to transform criticism into "trends". Take, for instance, the protest against thinness that lead to hiring token models such as fully-figured Sophie Dahl, particularly famous for her censored 2000 *Opium* campaign. The fashion system constantly offers products marketed for what Foucault has aptly termed the pleasures of insurrection, thus managing to be "preservative of the status quo while appearing to make claims of the opposite" (Finkelstein, 1991: 364).

with the economic concentration of the classic *haute couture maisons* in the hands of a few multinational groups, there was an increase in luxury labels thus erasing the frontiers that separate the high luxury goods and those that are distributed massively. According to a study by Eurostaf (cited in Lipovetsky & Roux, 2004: 103), the luxury industry turned 90 thousand million euros in the year 2000. The so-called "democratization of luxury" is supported by *dreamketing*, the mercantilization of dreams, aimed at producing an obsessive desire to consume. Hence, the luxury industry is nowadays a very power-ful industry that feeds other enterprises, such as the global music and entertainment business. However, as Entwistle rightly points out, fashion modelling is an "aesthetic economy... that depends upon cultural calculations as much as it does to economic ones" (Entwistle, 2002: 337). There is no doubt that, as the luxury goods industry so proudly claims, models' *glamour* is now superior to that of Hollywood actresses. But, what is making them glow so brightly?

DISPELLING GLAMOUR

> I am an optical illusion.

> Top model Clotilde, quoted in Lakoff and Scherr, 1984: p. 111

The brief cultural history of models I traced above reveals the social construction of these group of women performers as gender myths and cultural icons. Similarly to the way in which models' cards, or composites, present their measurements and photos sho-wing their different images, I have shown how several layers of mea-ning have been added to assemble a "composite" figure for presti-gious imitation. As we have seen, some of the cultural meanings embodied by models are: nationality, race and earning power. However, there are some more that I will review in what follows.

Our notion of self has moved from one based on the role played within a community to one bounded by the surface of the body. Subjects feel now responsible for developing their own iden-tity and, moreover, expressing it in their appearance. To serve this need, an industry arose to provide commoditized identities packa-ged as lifestyles (Featherstone, 1991). The identification of the self with the extended surface of the body allows the body to function as a skeleton on which these lifestyles can be hung. Consequently, models, initially used as mere clothes-horses, have now become physical embodiments of ideal identities. They have come to represent our ideals of beauty and social perfection. They mimic

Picture 2. "La Donna è mobile", by Michela Gattermayer, *Elle* (Italy) (1993) February, 123. This editorial page captures the chamaleonism promoted and demanded by fashion. The adjectives for the clothes allegedly expressed through the clothes are quite hilarious: intellectual, rational, "soap and water", feminine, vain, exhibitionist, trendy, classic, romantic, nostalgic, aggressive and junior.

the cultural values that have produced them and exemplify the success that sanctions conformity.

As Barthes notes, in fashion the multiplication of personalities in a single being is presented as an index of power (Barthes, 1977: 256-7). Since clothes are equated with personalities, the possession of a variety of garments that reveal different characters is interpreted as a sign of wealth and personal strength (picture 2). Fashion presents identity as an artificial construct that we can partake of if, and only if, we accept the transformational myth that the industry promotes. A manual for models declares: "a girl could be striking once she had been taught skin care, make-up and deportment by experts at a good school, and once her hair had been shaped and she had acquired a *personality*" (Dixon and Dixon, 1963: 34, emphasis added).

Furthermore, "the nameless girls whose careers endure for years are the chameleons who lose their own identities in whatever the fashion of the moment happens to be" (fa-shion editor, quoted in Keenan, 1977: 136). Hence, manuals recommend: "You must be so adaptable that your own personality can be constantly modified, played down or even radically changed to fit the requirements of

each photography" (Dixon and Dixon, 1963: 80). Similarly, a disposition to accommodate character to appearance is desirable: "in modelling school Naomi (Campbell) learnt that... clothes have their own personality, and... (that) a good model becomes the clothes she wears, adapting her own character to complement the garment." The disciplined chameleonic Supermodel confirms: "everything I put on feels different; it's like a different character" (Campbell, quoted in Jones, 1993: 56).

"Chamaleonism" confers on models a longer shelf life and defers the feared "burning out" moment when the glamour implodes, and these professionals are discarded like old dolls. However, the ability to adapt does not only concern models. "Chamaleonism" is a cultural and social value in its own right, given that the economy also demands subjects with the capacity to acquire new skills, spatial mobility and general malleability, to adapt to a highly volatile job market.

Concerning modelling as a professional option for women, two myths permeate the scenario: the traditional myth of the model who marries into money or society, and the newer myth of the model as an autonomous self-possessed woman. Concerning the first myth, a "fairy story for grown ups" (Jones, 1993: 11) which could be ironically termed "The Prince and the Model", it reiterates a notion of woman as an object whose beauty is instrumental for upward social mobility.[7] Instances of models marrying into money are often given by the glossies, such as the story of Natalia Vodianova, who married millionaire British aristocrat Justin Trevor Portman in a much-publicised wedding in Saint Petersburg.

With regards to the second myth, the model as an autonomous self-possessed woman in charge of her career, it is also a fiction devised by the fashion and modelling industries and reiterated by newspapers and popular literature. Allegedly, Supermodels are to be admired for taking control of the commercial exploitation of their own sexuality, instead of leaving it to others (Jones, 1993: 11; Rudolph, 1991: 64); moreover, it is argued that self-management in the exploitation of sexuality is an achievement of

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[7] Given that celebrity and economic success rewards conformity to normative identity patterns, models seem to establish the positive limits of such patterns, thus acting as the reverse of prostitutes who, in Juliano's analysis (Juliano, 2002), symbolise its negative limits. Thus, it could be argued that, in opposition to prostitutes who are "fallen" women, models are "ascended" women. It is not uncommon to find young women who combine both jobs to make ends meet or to increase their earnings. See Gross, 1996: 417, 425.

feminism.[8] Camille Paglia reiterates this myth by regarding Supermodels as a much needed "icon and role model" since they have successfully achieved the goal of the nineties' women: "to be sexual and career women at the same time" (Paglia, quoted in Jones, 1993: 11-12).

In fact, very few models actually manage themselves: "I never felt in control as a model. I never knew what was going to happen to me next. And the girls who really lasted... never were the best models; they were just the ones who had these great business advisers telling them what to do" (Lisa Taylor, quoted in Craik, 1994: 82). There are, however, exceptions to this rule, such as Crawford who sees herself as "a president of a company who owns a product, Cindy Crawford, that everybody wants" (Crawford, quoted in *The Fashion Book*, 1998: 117).

Nowadays, the discourse about economic and social improvement of models is particularly visible in relation to young women from Eastern Europe who, reportedly, have risen from poor backgrounds to achieve fortune and fame through their modelling career, as for instance Natalia Vodianova who went "from fruit seller to the world's best paid model" (*Lecturas*, 2003: 90). This discourse on the "New Cynderellas" presents modelling as a good way of escaping poverty although, in fact, only very few of these young women actually manage to achieve economic stability working as models.

As the historical review reveals, the social discourse surrounding

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[8] The position of some feminist sectors is paradoxical, since they consider models as both victims of the hegemonic gender definitions and its censurable promoters. I experienced both treatments by Lidia Falcón, president of the Spanish Feminist Party, who anonymously sent a couple of journalists to interview me and take pictures for an article which she signed as coordinator (Falcón and Hijar, 1982). In the article, models were presented as dumb dolls completely mesmerized by our own image and public admiration, and totally unaware of the "perils" of our profession. Amongst other false facts, it was suggested in the article that I was being paid for having sex with my male clients —amazingly, the existence of a little piano in my family's flat is cited as a reliable sign leading to this assumption! (*ibid.*, 75). The authors clearly equated modelling with sexual work. The allegation was not only untrue in relation to my professional activities, it also seemed to assume a notion of sexual workers as morally despicable— a position I totally disagree with. In the current social context in which gender differences concerning professional opportunities, prestige and pay are still rife, the widespread value put on females beauty drives many young women to try to profit from their looks. Feminism should try to overcome their dogmatic stance and prejudices concerning this issue: not all professional models are victims of exploitation, nor do they hold full responsibility for the tyrannical pressure of image that affects us all. Moreover, a rigorous analysis of the construction of beauty models would be very fruitful in order to advance knowledge about the objectification of women that underlies gender violence.

models link beauty with socio-economic power and high self-esteem. Self-confidence is an emotion models constantly perform, although the aesthetical and emotional expression of social status and self-assurance has varied from Dolores who played "Empress of Fashion, the Discourager of Hesitancy" in Ziegfield Follies (Evans, 2001: 283), to the "polished *froideur*" that signified "class" (*The Fashion Book* referring to model Bettina, 1998: 54), ending in the permanent euphoria of being "three or four glasses of champagne high" (Moncur, 1991: 2) or "the great 'fuck you' moment when you looked like you had it all" (Webb, quoted in Perkins & Givhan, 1998, not numbered).

To "be" a model is tantamount to obtaining the "official degree certificate" in beauty certifying normative compliance and social acceptability. By embodying alleged physical perfection and permanent self-confidence, models' images and public personas make us believe in the utopian possibility of avoiding the discredit and abjection that menaces many women for not conforming to aesthetic and behavioural norms. The underlying notion is that self-confidence can be achieved through conformity to beauty standards, and that such conformity is rewarded with self-deserved assertiveness and a better social position. As hip hop *entrepreneur* Simmons puts it: "upper income fashion is about success and that's what people are buying into" (Simmons, quoted in Perkins & Givhan, 1998, pages not numbered).

However, models feel different from the picture they portray: "I felt bad inside my body and very rarely splendid" (Fressange, 2002: 117, my translation); or: "It's hard to work in the catwalk... you are surrounded by the forty most beautiful women in the world. You see all your imperfections and none of theirs" (Cindy Crawford, cited in Rudolph, 1991: 66).[9] To embody a utopia has its downsides, such as being alienated from one's own image, being considered as unreal or intellectually handicapped, becoming the object of envy, and so on. In fact, the image of models as "independent" (Castle, 1977: 84) "young self-possessed women" (O'Neill, 1985: 101) crumbles as one learns about their complete dependence on their agents, their chronic insecurity concerning their physique, the health hazards caused by dieting, and the lack of confidence ex-models then go on to experience in their subsequent careers due to the assumption that they only get work because of their physical appearance (Foley, 1989).

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[9] For other examples from celebrity models see Soley-Beltran, 1999.

Success is also signified by slenderness.[10] The standardization of beauty performed by the modelling system has made slenderness the canon as well as a sign of leisure and conformity. In modelling, being slim helps focusing the viewers' attention on the garments and away from the models' bodies. Models are defined by manuals as the "skeleton of beauty", "almost literally a clothes-horse" (Dixon and Dixon, 1963: 25, 80). Slimness also stands as a sign of the transcendence of material necessities and youth.

The association of modelling with an ideal state is not only related to their income, but also to the imagined possibility of living in a pleasant dream, a myth promoted by designers: "I don't even want to be a lady. I want to be a woman... the clothes are so beautiful. It's fantasy." (Isaac Mizrahi, quoted in Perkins & Givhan, 1998: pages not numbered.) Similarly, Dior declared: "The world is a cruel place; women must become their smile" (Dior, quoted in Quick, 1997: 71 —my translation); and Ralph Lauren declares: "I do not design clothes, I design dreams" (Lauren, in *Marie Claire*, 2003: 132). Thus, what is being promoted is a fantastic idea of womanhood paired with the aspiration to an existence beyond restrictions. For this reason, models' bodies are described as "transcend(ing) the limits of culture" (Versace, 1997: 7) and fashion is celebrated as a postmodern phenomena, given that: "when substance is dead, style lives on" (Fink, 2000, unnumbered). In sum, models' public personas are "simulacra" (Baudrillard, 1993), that is, sophisticated artefacts performed and marketed by a team of professionals that become the reference for gender perfection and desirability as if they were "real".[11]

However, the artificiality of models as myths is disguised by the contrast cast between real/unreal beauty cited in the modelling discourse. Such contrast is superseded by conceiving of the body as an artefact constituted by the reiteration of collectively defined norms regulating identity. If we understand the body as

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[10] For reasons of space and scope, I will not go into the issue of models' ideal slenderness as one of the causes for the increase of *anorexia nervosa* (see, for instance, Bordo, 1993).

[11] Shows themselves are also simulacra in so far as "fashion shows are part of the *couture* labels' 'advertising budget' since *couture* does not make profits" (Pierre Berge, business brain of Yves Saint Laurent quoted in Coleridge, 1988: 168-9). The real function of the shows is to impress the press by an increasingly complicated staging, and to meet the conditions of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*, which authorizes a designer to trade as a couturier. Such authorization is necessary in order to obtain a licence to rent out use of designers' names, which are the companies' real source of income.

the site of the interaction between the individual and the collective, we can account for the special erasure between the private and the public spheres that models experience. A number of them have a very acute experience of the gap between "private" self-notion and the "public" image that is demanded of them:

> I felt intimately involved in my job since my own emotions were reflected in my body and its movement when performing. In contrast, I felt strong limitations were being placed on the expression of my private self, since I had to adjust to the publicly established canons, which felt to me like a prison. It felt as if I was in a school for young ladies being trained to be the courtesan (Cristina).

Often models feel alienated from their own image. The need to consider one's own body appearance as a professional "instrument" forces models to undergo humiliation with "professionalism" since their job involves "to be used as a piece of flesh" (top model and agent Wilhelmina, quoted in Hartman, 1980: 77). In order to keep a minimum sense of personal dignity, models develop strategies to distance themselves from their bodies. Interestingly, alienation is accompanied by models' awareness of the performative action their job has on their self-perception: "to a certain extent, you become your own image" (Cristina); "one gets reduced to an image. And for the profession, to a surface. One unavoidably one becomes egocentric. One permanently looks at one's navel" (Fressange, 2002: 115). Moreover, self-perception is deeply affected: "I always had the crazy idea of buying dresses thinking that I would feel better. As if feeling well in my body would come from the exterior and not from myself" (*ibid*. 117).

It ensues a sense of exposure and fragility: "The more visible I become the more invisible I feel" (Moss quoted in Mackay 1995: 3) which at times is fought with artistic strategies. This is the case of Veruschka's artwork that involves "working against my modelling career" (Veruschka, quoted in *The Fashion Book*, 1998: 483) by painting her naked body mimicking the rusted walls of the old factories to the point of making it disappear. In my personal experience, far from giving me a feeling of personal power, as a number of people assumed, my "glamour" made me anxious, for I was aware of arousing a desire I knew I could not fulfill. Thus, I knew I was exposing myself to others' frustration and accused of being an *allumeuse*, a *coquette* leading myself and others to a wheel of endless dissatisfaction. As a consequence, I lived in fear of my own "model" self! (picture 3).

Picture 3. Model: Patrícia Soley-Beltran. Photographer: Emerico Mancuso. As a model I often played a very happy, smiling person, to enact a series of characters that ranged from young women to middle-aged house-wives. This picture was taken at the end of my career. At the time I was simply unable to smile without incu-rring into facial mus-cular spasms.

FINALE

Persona (Latin) actor's mask, character in a play, person.

Longman Dictionary, 1985

The study of fashion modelling reveals models' hegemonic beauty as a mechanism defining and regulating the normative standards for acceptable identity. As their cultural history reveals, models' glamour conveys symbolic meanings concerning class, nationality, race, social mobility, self-control, malleability, gender proficiency, wealth, power, success and the alleged self-assurance that accompanies them. Models' public personas symbolise an ideal self and allegedly demonstrate the possibility and desirability of its attainment. They have become icons of beauty and social perfection exemplifying success as a reward for conformity. When they are associated with certain products, they become fetishes of

economic and social success. This association can rise to grotesque levels, as illustrated by the case of the Japanese tourists who cried with emotion when discovering model Inès de la Fressange walking in Maison Chanel in Paris, as the model herself explains (Fressange, 2002: 102); or the more recent case of model Kate Moss whose old and well-known drug habit almost ruined her modelling career when, in fact, her image has always been associated with an exciting and wild night-life.

However, the experiences of professional models reveal that their performance has its drawbacks, such as lack of control over their professional careers, alienation from their own selves, bodies and emotions, personal insecurity, and so on. Nevertheless, the discourse conveyed through models' bodies presents *glamour* as a relatively affordable quality, providing one makes the right consumption choice. Through its visual power, the industry of luxury goods weaves its magic to create unattainable myths inspiring desires whose fulfilment is forever deferred. In ancient English the term *glamour* was etymologically related to the word "grammar", since *glamour* was the aura that surrounded those who, by virtue of being literate, hold spelling power. In the age of visual communication, models' are emblems of cultural values and their *glamour* is still related to economic and social power.

Models are both performers and subjects of performativity: they are performers in that it is their professional duty to efficiently act out the collectively defined standards of identity; they are also subjects of performativity in that they are themselves constituted by their disciplined reiteration of these standards. As shown, models learn to exert a tight control over their bodies, facial expressions, appearance, public conduct and self-understanding in accordance to prescribed ideals, while their public personas are fashioned into sophisticated artefacts through the successive addition of layers of symbolic meanings. In sum, the study of modelling discloses how an artificial construct, models' public personas, becomes a reference for prestigious imitation and desirability as if they were attainable and real when, in fact, they are nothing but fiction.

Considering beauty as a very powerful myth and approaching the true *backstage* of fashion —not the one "revealed" by the banal pictures of the wings of the catwalk, but that of the social *dispositifs* to constitute desire— proves to be a fruitful exercise. In the age of visual communication, *glamour* "casts a spell" through its conjuration of power and, in spite of its progressive preten-

sions, the fashion business will only be radical if it manages to listen to critical discourses and modifies its own structures and means of production. Maybe the time has come for consumers to "break the spell" that, no doubt, we would qualify as being "primitive" if it were practised in cultures that were not our own. Maybe, too, it is time for us to stop believing that appearance can become substance.

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