

The show must go on: making money glamorizing oppression

Article

Accepted Version

Della Giusta, M. and Scuriatti, L. (2005) The show must go on: making money glamorizing oppression. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12 (1). pp. 31-44. ISSN 1461-7420 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506805048854> Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/18096/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350506805048854>

Publisher: SAGE publications

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

The Show Must Go On

Making Money Glamorizing Oppression

Marina Della Giusta

UNIVERSITY OF READING BUSINESS SCHOOL

Laura Scuriatti

EUROPEAN COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

ABSTRACT This article presents an interdisciplinary analysis of the glamorization of the courtesan image as proposed by Baz Luhrmann's film *Moulin Rouge*. The film sparked the appearance of high-street fashion inspired by the image of the 19th-century Parisian courtesan, which prompted the authors to examine how and why such images might appeal to female consumers. The critical analysis reaches beyond the images themselves to identify and discuss the modes of circulation of such images, and their function in achieving both the material ends of capitalism (ever-increasing consumption and production) and the promotion of one of the system's core values (patriarchy). Moreover, the article hopes to illustrate the possibilities offered by integrating cultural and structural analyses of current social phenomena.

KEY WORDS advertising ♦ commodification ♦ consumerism ♦ fashion industry ♦ feminism ♦ film ♦ prostitution (images of) ♦ subversion

INTRODUCTION

As often happens with lines of fashion inspired by films or specific cultural phenomena, the clothes and accessories inspired by *Moulin Rouge* did not dominate the shop windows for a whole season, although they appear to have entered the repertoire and are, to an extent, re-proposed in various forms. We therefore do not want to suggest that this line of fashion effected a profound change or was particularly influential at a specific point in time, but rather want to understand how clothes linked to the image of the courtesan may appeal to female consumers. How and

European Journal of Women's Studies Copyright © 2005 SAGE Publications
(London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), 1350-5068 Vol. 12(1): 31-44;
DOI: 10.1177/1350506805048854

why would female buyers want to be associated with the image of a courtesan? Why would the image of the courtesan not clash with the widespread social stigma associated with the phenomenon of prostitution? Why are images of prostitutes made glamorous? Is it an act of empowerment? Does it subvert and critique the power relations subsuming gender, and perhaps class identity in our society?

To address these questions, we assess how an image may be made glamorous through the filter of fashion and of a film, and thus rendered appealing. We start by analysing the treatment of the figure of the courtesan in the film *Moulin Rouge* in relation to its historical and cultural context and then move to a wider discussion of the implications of glamorizing the image of the courtesan. We then ask whether, for female consumers, buying clothes associated to the image of the courtesan may imply an act of appropriation and subversion of a role that has traditionally been seen as degrading and/or insulting for women in the same way as, for example, racist jargon is reappropriated by the very individuals or groups which it means to insult. We use critical tools to analyse the idea of subversion by asking whether fashion offers a viable context for the subversion of images of female oppression, and to address this we consider the social and economic context in which these images circulate. Having identified the characteristics of the process of glamorization, we address the role of this instrument within wider socioeconomic structures, particularly addressing consumerism and its constitutive functioning elements and values.

MOULIN ROUGE

The film is set in a computer-generated Paris of 1899, and is centred on the famous cabaret Moulin Rouge. The city, the music, the history and the setting do not aim to be historically faithful, but rather are a pastiche of old and new soundtracks, stories and images, teeming with textual and visual references to other films, musicals, themes and contemporary figures, such as, for example, Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the singer Madonna, Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* (which Baz Luhrmann produced for Broadway in 2003), John Huston's biopic of Toulouse Lautrec, the summer of love of 1969, some songs by The Police and many other subtexts.

The story is told by grief-stricken Christian (actor Ewan McGregor), a young and naive poet from England, arrived in Paris in order to write his first novel. After joining a desperately poor and unsuccessful theatre company, he decides to help them produce a musical by tricking the beautiful Moulin Rouge courtesan and singer Satine (Nicole Kidman) into obtaining the money for the show. On the other hand, Satine, who wants

to become a theatre actress, is sold by Harold Zidler (Jim Broadbent), the Moulin Rouge's manager, to the Duke (Richard Roxborough), who is ready to finance the transformation of the cabaret into a proper theatre on the condition that he has exclusive access to the favours of Satine. Since the survival of the Moulin Rouge depends on Satine's sacrifice to the Duke, the love between Satine and Christian is doomed. Satine dies of consumption, and her tragic story becomes Christian's first novel.

The figure of Satine is constructed along a few main ideas: as a courtesan, she has an economic value, and indeed, when she performs the song 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend', she is also called 'Satine-Diamond'; moreover, at different points in the film both Christian and Zidler use her as bait to obtain the Duke's money. She is at the same time a courtesan, and a 'virgin': she is a virgin because she had never loved until she met Christian, and because she is sold to the Duke as a 'virgin' – a condition which increases her market value and heightens her dramatic sacrifice. It is also important to note that, throughout the film, Satine is presented also as pure woman in the moral sense, fundamentally out of place in the environment of the Moulin Rouge. This is also a precondition for the development of her love story with the young poet.

In the film, the character of Satine therefore seems to personify some of the traditional stereotypes that constitute female identity in patriarchy: Satine is identified by her sexual potential, and her social and moral status is defined by the use and accessibility of her body.¹ Considering the proliferation of these images on the high street through fashion, we need to ask whether these stereotypes may not in fact be used in a subversive way, as tools for exposing the ideology informing them.

Kidman's role is constituted by multiple layers of different icons of femininity: her performance of 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' contains both references to Marilyn Monroe's act in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and to Madonna's reinterpretation of the same act in her pop video 'Material Girl'. In her essay on Madonna, Cathy Schwichtenberg argues that in some of her videos Madonna presents herself as 'femininity in excess' through 'the drama of vision': her body is thus made to function as a 'prop that simulates the excessive femininity of male projections, only to turn that vision against itself. . . . The exhibitionist knows that the voyeur is watching; thus, Madonna bares the devices of femininity, thereby asserting that femininity is a device' (Schwichtenberg, 1995: 133). In this way, explains Schwichtenberg, Madonna's representation of femininity at least until the early 1990s can be seen as critical and subversive, as it stages femininity as a masquerade and as projection onto a body, which is sexualized and commodified to suit male desire, and thus challenges it. Moreover, Madonna plays with the traditional dichotomy 'virgin/whore', which continues in more or less subtle ways to stigmatize women's behaviour and role in society. In this way, according to

Schwichtenberg and others, Madonna draws attention to the fact that women are still defined through their bodies and the management of their sexual potential. Madonna's figure is obviously extremely complex; numerous cultural theoreticians and feminists, including Mary Ann Doane, bell hooks and Susan Bordo, have reflected on the problems implicit in her performances, but this is not the appropriate place to discuss this further.

However, it is important to first consider how the Madonna quote functions in the film and to enquire whether the filmic text may provide a critique of the stereotypes produced by some of its intertextual references. If, in some of Madonna's videos, the acting out of gender and sexual stereotypes may lead to their own destabilization, we think this certainly is not the case in *Moulin Rouge*. On the contrary the film idealizes and romanticizes gender stereotypes and female oppression. For example, the Moulin Rouge customers who pay for the courtesan are presented to the cabaret public as 'the lady's choice'. Moreover, at the very moment when Satine 'chooses' the Duke, she sings a song made up of 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' and 'Material Girl': these elements, we think, derive from stereotypical prejudices and ideas around prostitution. Indeed, prostitutes are often presented as universally and always freely choosing their profession, an idea that serves to hide the social and economic conditions in which much prostitution flourishes. The songs and act performed by Satine present prostitution as a relatively desirable profession, one which enhances a woman's social and economic status.

Would it be possible to read Satine's performance of 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' and 'Material Girl' as an exposure of the exploitative mechanisms subsuming the construction of the figure of the courtesan? We want to argue that this is also not the case. It may be argued that Satine is represented as 'performing' a prescribed female role, and that it is precisely through this act of performance that the ideological constituents and the cultural stigmas attached to that role may be destabilized.

We do not, however, believe that this is the case in Luhrmann's film, first of all because the film does not destabilize, but rather reasserts, some basic and extremely trite signifiers of masculinity and femininity which maintain the discursive power of patriarchy. This is not only because of the point just made about the economics of prostitution, which could be read as a critique to bourgeois and capitalist ideology, as we see later, but also because, in order to fulfil the requirements of the typical Hollywood love story, the image of the courtesan is here filtered through its symmetrically opposite stereotype: the virgin. Indeed, the precondition for the Duke's 'investment' (as it is described in the film) is that Satine is a virgin. As in many narratives of sex tourists, the customer needs to feel that he is the chosen one, and that he is the first one to lay claim to the woman's body (Thorbeck and Pattanaik, 2002). Angela Carter calls this 'the Monroe

syndrome'. Her discussion of the type of women impersonated by actresses such as Jean Harlow, Jayne Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe is illuminating in understanding Satine's characteristics: Carter argues that these female roles involved a combination of beauty, seductiveness and high sexual charge, together with an air of vulnerability and innocence. The arousal caused by the physical beauty is perceived as wrong, and must therefore be punished with a purifying sacrifice, which will make this figure all the more attractive:

In herself, this lovely ghost, this zombie, or woman who has never been completely born as a woman, only as a debased cultural idea of a woman, is appreciated only for her decorative value. Final condition for the imaginary prostitute: men would rather have slept with her than sleep with her. She is most arousing as a memory or as a masturbatory fantasy. If she is perceived as something else, the contradictions of her situation will destroy her. This is the Monroe syndrome. (Carter, 2000: 70)

The film therefore suggests that the courtesan must be both a courtesan and a virgin in order to be attractive: indeed a paradoxical fantasy, which ends with the woman's rape, and, successively, with her death. Indeed, this is what happens in *Moulin Rouge*. Satine, who cannot ultimately be both a courtesan and a virgin, has to die in order to become a masturbatory fantasy for all the male characters: for Christian and the Duke she will fulfil the role of the pure bride, to whom they can both lay claim as their own exclusive property, whereas for Zidler, described in the film website as both her pimp and her father-figure, she will be both the subservient prostitute and the pure loving child.

The deployment of this binary paradigm constitutes a crucial problem, which prevents us reading the film as subversive of social stigmas and stereotypes. In order to consider this problem, it is necessary to reflect on a few preliminary questions from the point of view of cultural history. Let us consider the context of 19th-century culture and literature, which inspires the film, and which teems with figures of prostitutes and fallen women. Many of these figures are often posited and can be read as a critique to dominant patriarchal ideology, whereby prostitution represents a defiant refusal to submit to the bourgeois ideology which constructed women as mostly mothers and wives, constructing their sexuality as negative and dangerous, which was necessary to regulate through legal, scientific, religious and political discourse. Thus, within a cultural discourse which, on the one hand, reduces women to their bodies and their sexual potential, and, on the other hand, constructs female bodies and sexuality as negative, prostitution may be seen both as the positive affirmation and expression of a sexuality otherwise negated at the level of public discourse, and as a declaration of independence, as a profession through which women could gain financial independence.

In this sense then, the deployment of the songs 'Material Girl' and 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friends' may be read indeed as the exposure of a view of success based on accumulation of capital and of the power relations subsuming the romantic idea of love in capitalism, as well as a positive affirmation of empowerment – a type of empowerment only reachable through the exercise of prostitution, in a society which capitalizes on such polarization of female roles.

However, what Satine in *Moulin Rouge* aspires to is romantic love, and the romantic relationship between her and the writer relies on her taking on the characteristics of a virtuous woman. There seems to be no alternative offered to Satine but to conform to the role of a virgin. We believe therefore that the presentation of the figure of the courtesan in the film fails to be a critical enactment and a reflection on the mechanisms subsuming the subordination of women in patriarchy.

Nevertheless, our analysis of the film does not necessarily rule out the possibility that, once on the high streets, the film-inspired clothes may be used in a subversive way by individual women buying them. We concentrate on the effect of the circulation of the image through high-street fashion and ask ourselves whether fashion per se may be a suitable context for subverting the ideological tenets informing the dominant view of female identity.

THE GLAMOROUS PROSTITUTE

Before continuing our argument with the analysis of the high-street versions of the clothes in *Moulin Rouge*, it is necessary to make a few preliminary remarks. One important question to consider is that, once these clothes appear in shops, they are sold outside their original context, and, as separate items. This means that any customer may buy one or more items without necessarily buying 'the look'. Therefore, we do not want to suggest that there is a specific 'prostitute look', or that certain items of clothing epitomize the image of prostitution.

We are interested, rather, in investigating the process through which prostitution, which still bears a negative cultural stigma, is deployed to make clothes attractive to buyers. We are aware that the very form of our question entails a negative view of prostitution, which may appear highly problematic. We address this issue at a later stage, but, in the light of what has been said so far, we would like to underline and make clear that our view of prostitution is not based on a moral judgement on the nature of the profession, but rather on the conviction that prostitution is the result of an oppressive mechanism deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology (O'Connell Davidson, 2002: 84–99).

However, with respect to the fashion industry, the first issue to be

considered is the fact that the historical look of the clothes provides the necessary distance and decontextualization which are needed to be able to buy the clothes without entering into the role of the courtesan, or, so to say, bearing the stigma associated with it, or being exposed to the problems implicit in that role. This can also be observed in the marketing concept characterizing the advertising campaigns of some luxury fashion producers in the last two years. Gucci, Sergio Rossi and Luis Vuitton, to name but a few, have all presented some of their goods in contexts in which female models were made to look like street prostitutes, or made to enact the role of a prostitute. In these cases, the status and price ranges of the products make it impossible for the customer to identify with the image proposed by the advertising campaign. Therefore, it seems that the numerous 'courtesan/prostitute' looks can only be proposed to customers as a fiction, which must be noticeably different, either because of class, or period, from the target consumer. In this way, it will be apparent that the role is taken up just temporarily, as a travesty.

The second issue concerns the way in which the figure of the courtesan is made appealing, so that female customers may be convinced to want to, albeit partially, identify with it. If, on the one hand, it may be argued that the appropriation of the image of the courtesan in films such as *Moulin Rouge* and in the entertainment business in general is an act of provocation and subversion of the stereotypes of womanhood, it is also important to note that in this way prostitution is decontextualized and associated with stardom and that the figure of the prostitute undergoes a process of glamorization.²

In the Cambridge International Dictionary of English the verb 'to glamorize' is defined as 'to make something seem better than it is and therefore more attractive'. Both the Concise Oxford Dictionary and the Collins Concise Dictionary also attribute to the verb and the noun 'glamorization' the connotations of charm, allure and enchantment.

Indeed, in both the case of fashion and of film, prostitution is presented as being about attracting and titillating the other sex. It is also unequivocally presented as a matter of choice: the night in which Satine is mistakenly sold to Christian, was 'Ladies' choice' night. The empowerment of prostitutes is often equated with the possibility of 'picking' the man of their choice among a host of suitors. By way of analogy, it can be useful to look at bell hooks' reflection on the phenomenon of glamorization in her discussion of the representation of black women in US society. hooks analyses the mechanisms which subsume the stereotypical portrait of black women as overpowering matriarchs, and suggests that this characterization is instrumental in making black women believe that 'they have social and political control over their lives', whereas they are actually 'economically oppressed and victimised by sexism' (hooks, 1982: 78–81). Parallel to this, hooks notes, white people created the 'mammy stereotype',

an image of 'black womanhood which they could tolerate, and that in no way resembled the great majority of black women'. The 'mammy image' epitomized a sexless, affectionate and completely submissive black woman – 'a passive nurturer, a mother figure who gave all without expectation of return, who not only acknowledged her inferiority to whites but who loved them' (hooks, 1982: 78–81). This stereotype is derived from the types of tasks usually assigned to black women during slavery, but erases the moral, social and economic issues linked with institutionalized slavery.

The theme of choice and the representation of prostitution as sexually or economically empowering function similarly. On the one hand, prostitutes are represented as empowered women; on the other hand, the stereotype of the 'virgin prostitute', who is pure, submissive and self-sacrificing, is belittling of prostitutes and shuns from confronting and exposing the complex social and economic issues subsuming the existence of prostitution.

Moreover, the combination of the two images repropose and puts back in circulation the dichotomy virgin/whore which has informed the construction of femininity in western culture for hundreds of years. The latter issue is of crucial importance as the association of prostitution and the fashion industry not only provides a biased view of prostitution, but it also constitutes a dangerous multiplier for the same age-old tenet that sees female identity as essentially linked to the body. If women's identity is defined by their bodies, these become the sites of struggle. And this prompts the question of why women would choose to endorse this process, which results in a multiple objectification of the female body.

Before proceeding to answer, or, at least, to investigate the possibilities implied in the question itself, it is necessary to consider a few other crucial points. In recent years, the fashion and advertising industries have been promoting a broad range of images which have generated heated debate. For example, some advertising campaigns featured models, initially mostly female, but increasingly of both sexes, with wasted looks and bony bodies, which have been interpreted either as the result of drug addiction or anorexia, or both (notorious among them, the Calvin Klein campaign featuring Kate Moss); others have presented images referring to drug addiction (for example, the campaign for Dior's perfume 'Addict'), or based entire campaigns generally on images of models which looked ill or dead (the campaign for Yves Saint Laurent's perfume 'Opium'). What all these images have in common, is the fact that they refer to situations and conditions which, like prostitution, generally bear a negative social stigma, or are not considered desirable.

In a sense, the iconoclastic claim of these advertisements and fashion styles may be read as a refusal of dominant aesthetic categories and fashion styles informed by the normative influence of high culture.

Moreover, the glamorization of disease, addiction and the condition of passivity with which they are associated may be read as a critique of the capitalist demands for beauty, health and for economically and sexually productive bodies. In this sense, they may be seen as opening up spaces for individuals to create and occupy new roles, alternative to the ones delineated and informed by the dominant ideology.

However, does this actually constitute a real act of subversion? Doesn't fashion, as in the case of prostitution, propose simplified, aestheticized and commodified images of drug addiction and illness, which do not take into account the complex economic and social causes, or the painful reality, of these conditions?

On the one hand, the 'wasted look' represents certainly a statement against female types circulating in the media and attached to female identity in western culture, corresponding to such restrictive roles as, for example, the successful professional, the happy mother, the free single woman – most of them informed by similar, class- and race-inflected standards of physical beauty and social status.

On the other hand, though, once these styles are circulated as fashion, they are already decontextualized and aestheticized; fashion and advertising fail to address the power relations informing these images, precisely because both fashion and advertising rely on those very relations.³

Thorstein Veblen and Walter Benjamin expose the role of fashion in reaffirming the position of women in society. Discussing the economics of a woman's dress, Veblen stresses the explicit connection between value of the dress and value of the woman, and the functions that the dress has in signalling the woman's role in society.⁴ Interestingly, Veblen also pointed to the travesty aspect of fashion, but rather than describing it as a playful activity he was worried about the realities recalled by the travesty, realities that nobody would really want to experience.⁵ As Susan Buck-Morss explains, Walter Benjamin noted in his *Passagen-Werk* that fashion covered up reality, rearranging the given, 'merely symbolising historical change, rather than ushering it in' and described fashion as 'the dialectical switching station between woman and commodity' (Buck-Morss, 1990: 100–1).

Further to this point, Georg Simmel notes that fashion functions on the basis of constant change of content and seems to offer an opportunity for any individual to affirm him-/herself in society through differentiation; however, argues Simmel, the fashion system relies on a social texture based on stable class difference, which emerges and is reaffirmed precisely through the circulation of the content from top to bottom: once a certain type of fashion is appropriated by the lower classes and reproduced in a cheaper version, it ceases to be fashionable among the upper classes and once again confirms the very difference it seemed to be able to erase (Simmel, 1957). Thus, the fashion system seems to function as an

ultimately stabilizing tool, whose mechanisms tend towards conservation, rather than disruption, of social power structures.

FROM TRAVESTY TO INEQUALITY

Consumer theory suggests that, at the individual level, purchases happen if they are at least believed to enhance the consumer's utility. Utility can, however, increase for a number of reasons, and without empirical research one can only speculate as to what women purchasing courtesan-style clothes may be doing, depending on what they think of the image and how and when they wear the clothes. Part of the travesty aspect could be connected to a fantasy of sexual power, or perhaps one of sexual availability, or maybe just aim to shock or outrage, enacting a fantasy of total individualism. What is essential in this argument is that there is a connection between consumption and satisfaction. From this follows that some degree of dissatisfaction needs to exist that can be channelled towards the acquisition of fashion items (in the same way hunger makes us want food). The fashion industry (much like any other) pursues the maximization of profits and makes use of several marketing tools acting to identify and channel needs to this effect. However, in this process not just consumption is encouraged, but at the very minimum consumerism and other values of the system the industry exists in are being promoted as well.

Consumerism is based on needs that can never be completely satisfied, and the circulation of unattainable ideals in turn serves multiple purposes outside the strict realm of consumption. In the context of the beauty ideals proposed to women and youth, for example, Wolf (1990) suggests that the enormous amounts of time and resources that are spent striving to achieve this unattainable ideal are not only designed to fail, but also amount to a diversion of effort away from other goals (economic as well as political and personal), which could perhaps contribute to make society less unequal.

Patriarchy has been defined as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990). It must be stressed that social structures, not individuals, are made responsible for this systematic oppression. Six elements characterize patriarchal social systems: relations in the family, in paid work, in the state, male violence, sexuality and culture. Examples are the exploitation of women's unpaid work in the domestic sphere, the fact that men have more qualified and better paid jobs, state policies supporting the gendered division of labour with women doing the reproductive work and men the productive work, all forms of sexual violence, sexism in education and the media, etc. The combination of patriarchal relations in

paid work and in the household reinforces women's inequality in all spheres of society, from the political to the cultural arena (Moller Okin, 1989). The symptoms of this systematic oppression can be observed in women's unequal opportunities to enjoy rights, goods and resources.

Maria Mies's work explores the connections between patriarchy (as one form of inequality) and capital accumulation, and suggests that there exists an international division of labour based on relationships of production and consumption that are structured in very unequal ways along, among others, gender lines (Mies, 1986).⁶ Capital accumulation is not based on the extraction of surplus labour, she argues, but rather on the systematic deprivation of certain categories of people (both in developed and developing countries) of their means of subsistence, people whose work is often not even acknowledged as productive. In her work, the role of western women and women in privileged groups in developing countries as exploited consumers and that of the majority of women in developing countries as exploited producers are seen as two faces of the same coin. Whereas the exploited female producers are bound to low-wage and insecure jobs, privileged women are being targeted as consumers, and their identity constructed as sexual commodities, making it difficult for them to challenge the productive (and political) establishment.

The arguments presented enable us to establish the connection between patriarchy and consumerism as follows: patriarchy as an unequal system ensures the presence of need, and a good advertising system is one that both ensures the channelling of the need towards consumption, and the maintenance of the unequal system. Marketing experts may not necessarily want or choose to promote inequality, but they are themselves part of society, so presumably they simply express the values they were brought up with.

The use of images of prostitution in fashion and fashion advertising is located at the intersection of these issues: the commodification of the female body is a product of non-egalitarian relations, which express themselves at the social, economic and sexual levels, and on which capitalism is ultimately based. The need for a specific role for women as consumers leads to continuously reinventing their subordinate role, and in this sense glamorization of images of subordination is just one tool. The presentation of images of prostitution in fashion cannot be considered in any way as an appropriation and subversion of images of female subordination, not unless the stigma associated with this profession is also removed and the latter recognized as such. Indeed, as Teresa de Lauretis argues, any changes in the condition of women are meaningless if they are not accompanied by an alteration of the existing social relations, on which patriarchal society is based (de Lauretis, 1987: 21). The focus of the fashion industry and of fashion advertising is precisely the commodification of

the female body and of its sexual potentiality with the aim of fostering and increasing consumerism. In this sense, the commodification of women's bodies is continuously reinvented and repackaged, to create and foster further commodification.

CONCLUSIONS

Critically analysing the images of women that circulate in the media requires addressing several questions about the relation between the images and the context in which they are produced, the responses they generate among consumers, the meanings they circulate and the kind of values they promote. Addressing these questions in relation to the image of the courtesan has led us to discuss several of the classic prejudices proposed through images of women, and to focus on the process of glamorization and its function in the context of a broader structural analysis of the connection between patriarchy and consumerism.

Glamorization works on many different levels and through different media, investing other social positions or roles taken on by women, for instance the propagation of stereotype images of housewives, career women, female teachers and many other professions, which are presented as 'feminine'. This lies, perhaps, in the very nature of capitalism, which needs to reproduce itself by denying the power relations by which it is ruled.

NOTES

The authors wish to acknowledge the helpful comments and suggestions received by Mark Casson, Alexander Graf, Daniela La Penna, Emanuela Lombardo, Francesca Muscau, Ciaran O'Kelly and Mark Walker.

1. Michel Foucault suggests that the construction of the female body as 'thoroughly saturated with sexuality' was one of the main strategies which, 'beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centring on sex' (Foucault, 1998: 104). In his analysis, 'power is exercised in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations', and the relations of power are immanent in 'economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations' (Foucault, 1998: 94).
2. This is true not only for *Moulin Rouge*, but also for an endless series of American and European films in which prostitutes are glamorized in different ways. To name but a few: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1963), *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995), *From Hell* (2001).
3. From this point of view, it is important to note that the models featuring in such campaigns are not exclusively female. In fact, in recent years the number of male models which appeared in campaigns characterized by references to drug addiction, illness, languor and sexual exploitation has

been increasing enormously. This has resulted in the circulation of an androgynous look, which undermines dominant images of masculinity; however, it is important to note that in most of these cases the male models are in their early teens, and their personas are not made to look older, as happens with young female models. This seems to suggest that, in the case of masculine identity, a deviation from the norm is only accepted as a sort of 'incomplete' stage; second, it would be interesting to investigate what power relations are implied in the deployment of teenage models to perform these particular roles.

4. Under the patriarchal organisation of society, where the social unit was the man (with his dependants), the dress of the women was an exponent of the wealth of the man whose chattels they were. In modern society, where the unit is the household, the woman's dress sets forth the wealth of the household to which she belongs. Still, even today, in spite of the nominal and somewhat celebrated demise of the patriarchal idea, there is that about the dress of women which suggests that the wearer is something in the nature of a chattel; indeed, the theory of woman's dress quite plainly involves the implication that the woman is a chattel. (see Veblen [1894], 1964: 67)
5. The requirement of novelty acts to develop a complex and extensive system of pretences, ever varying and transient in point of detail, but each imperative during its allotted time- facings, edgings, and the many (pseudo) deceptive contrivances that will occur to any one that is at all familiar with the technique of dress. This pretence of deception is often developed into a pathetic, childlike make- believe. The realities which it simulates, or rather symbolises, could not be tolerated. (Veblen [1894], 1964: 72-3)
6. The strategy of mobilising poor, cheap, docile, dexterous, submissive Third World women for export-oriented production is only one side of the global division of labour. . . . it is not enough that these commodities are produced as cheaply as possible, they also have to be sold. In the marketing strategies of the Western and Japanese corporations which are thriving on the export-oriented production in Third World countries, Western women play a crucial role too, but this time not as producers, but as consumers, as housewives, mothers and sex objects (Mies, 1986: 120).

REFERENCES

- Buck-Morss, Susan (1990) *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Carter, Angela (2000) *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. London: Virago Press.
- De Lauretis, Teresa (1987) *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel (1998) *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1. The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3rd edn. London: Penguin.
- hooks, bell (1982) *Ain't I a Woman*. London: Pluto Press.
- Mies, Maria (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. London: Zed Books.
- Moller Okin, Susan (1989) *Justice, Gender and the Family*. Boulder, CO: Basic Books.
- O'Connell Davidson, Julia (2002) 'The Rights and Wrongs of Prostitution', *Hypatia* 17(2): 84-99.

- Schwichtenberg, Cathy (1995) 'Madonna's Postmodern Feminism: Bringing the Margins to the Center', pp. 129–45 in Cathy Schwichtenberg (ed.) *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Simmel, G. (1957) 'Fashion', *The American Journal of Sociology* 6: 541–58.
- Thorbeck, Susanne and Bandana Pattanaik, eds (2002) *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Global Patterns*. London: Zed Books.
- Veblen, Thorstein (1964) 'The Economic Theory of Woman's Dress', in Leon Ardzrooni (ed.) *Essays in Our Changing Order*. New York: Augusts M. Kelley. (Orig. pub. 1894.)
- Walby, Sylvia (1990) *Theorising Patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wolf, Naomi (1990) *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Marina Della Giusta is a lecturer in economics at Reading University Business School. She holds a degree in economics from Venice University and MSc in economic development and a doctorate from Reading University. Her research interests are in the areas of development and institutional economics, focusing particularly on the roles of institutions and social mechanisms in market access and gender. Her main publications are in the areas of micro-finance and social capital and institutional design of development organizations. She is currently doing work on the economics of trust, the economics of prostitution and the responses of households, firms and communities in developing countries to institutional change. Address: Department of Economics, University of Reading Business School Whiteknights, Reading RG6 6AA, UK. [email: m.dellagiusta@rdg.ac.uk]

Laura Scuriatti is assistant professor of literature at the European College of Liberal Arts in Berlin, Germany. After obtaining a degree in modern languages and literature at the Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy, she was awarded an MA by the University of Reading following a course on Victorian and modernist literature and the visual arts. She received a doctorate in English literature at the University of Reading with a thesis on the construction of gender identity and the representation of space in the works of Virginia Woolf and Mina Loy. Her current research focuses on modernist literature and European feminist avant-garde writers. She has published on the authors H.G. Wells and Ford Madox Ford. Address: ECLA (European College of Liberal Arts), Platanenstr. 24, 13156 Berlin, Germany. [email: l.scuriatti@t-online.de]