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The Return of the Celebrity Fashion Muse: Brand Endorsement, Creative Inspiration and Celebrity-Influenced Design Communication

Abstract

This article examines the current prevalence of fashion designers working in association with celebrity ‘muses’, famous figures drawn from acting and popular music, who serve to front brand campaigns, but also embody the identity of fashion houses and inspire designers. The article discusses the ancient origin of the Muse figure and explores the ways in which the muse principle was incorporated into fashion via the model, but subsequently included celebrities. In this regard, the article discusses the iconic celebrity muse precedents represented by the creative relationships between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy and Jackie Kennedy and Oleg Cassini, arguing that while this dynamic has seen a significant revival in the twenty-first, it is of a differing kind in that the muse dimension has (drawing upon the concepts of media spectacle and implosion) fused with the contemporary endorser/brand ambassador role. The article considers the key principles of celebrity brand endorsement and explores how the position of brand ambassador has evolved into that of the fashion muse, a term used by designers such as Karl Lagerfeld, Nicolas Ghesquière, and Olivier Rousteing in their work with celebrities such as Kristen Stewart, Alicia Vikander, Léa Seydoux, and Kim Kardashian. Therefore, the article argues that the contemporary fashion muse represents the further embedded status of celebrity within fashion brand communication.

Keywords: muse, celebrity, brand endorsement, spectacle, media implosion

In examining the nature of the design process within the fashion industry, Sorger and Udale state that “designers do not just sit at a desk and design pretty frocks. They need to research and develop a theme” (2017 8). In their view, research is the essential method that stimulates the designer’s imagination and sparks creative ideas for new collections, and such inspiration may be found in works of literature, history, politics, cinema, television, museum exhibitions, or historic garments. However, designers may also identify a ‘Muse’ figure and draw from them an aesthetic that informs a collection, or series of fashion design work. For example, Alexander McQueen, John Galliano and Karl Lagerfeld created collections inspired by the life and image of the Marchesa Luisa Casati (1881-1957), the Italian heiress, arts patron and bohemian, who was famously photographed by Man Ray in the early 1920s (Pechman 2017). With further regard to McQueen, Isabella Blow served as his Muse for “The Widows of Culloden” and “La Dame Bieue” fashion shows (Sorger and Dale 2017). Therefore, inspiration within this context can be perceived as a force that “is evoked and sustained by an illuminating stimulus object, such as an idea, person, or act” (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy and Ryan 2010, 470).

In relation to fashion, the muse has been traditionally identified in relation to the changing image of the fashion model. As Koda and Yohannan (2009) argue, from the beginning of the 20th century, alongside the fashion model, a role professionalized due to the influence of Charles Worth, Paul Poiret, Lady Duff Gordon, Coco Chanel, and Christian Dior (Evans 2001; Wissinger 2015), socialites, theatre actors, pop performers, and Hollywood movie stars would represent fashion designers’ work within popular publications. Yet, as Koda and Yohannan state, irrespective of “the historic tendency towards personality to represent fashion houses and cosmetics companies, it is still the professional editorial model that seems to best embody prevailing ideals not only of fashion, but also of feminine beauty” (2009 12). However, the line between modelling and celebrity became increasingly blurred, a process that

began in the 1960s with Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton, progressing into the 1970s with Jerry Hall, reaching its apotheosis in the 1990s – the era of the ‘Supermodel’. Within this period, models such as Cindy Crawford, Linda Evangelista and Naomi Campbell became “as much fodder for the gossip columns and for magazines as the rock and movie stars” (Koda and Yohannan 2009 15) and would become recognised as major celebrity figures in their own right (Church Gibson 2012). This transformation has become even more contemporaneously marked with cultural status of models such as Gigi and Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner, all of whom were previously famous through their Reality TV family backgrounds (*The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*), and the possessors of Instagram followings that number in the tens of millions (Schlossberg 2016; Fowler 2018). As such, while the celebrity status and visibility of select models has been amplified within popular culture, the figure of the muse has also become an increasingly visible aspect of the fashion industry, with designers and fashion houses such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Moschino, and Balmain now centrally displaying prominent celebrity muses. Thus, this arguably contradicts Koda and Yohannan’s view that the professional fashion model remains the major inspirational figure within fashion communication and promotion.

In this context, the article will examine the development of the celebrity fashion muse, from classic examples of the enduring and creative relationships between Hubert de Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn, and Jackie Kennedy and Oleg Cassini, to the increasing contemporary prevalence of the celebrity muse within the most prominent fashion houses. Hence, while the professional model retains a vital role within the runway displays of collections, celebrities are increasingly the ‘face’, but, more crucially, the ‘inspiration’ that infuses key modes of fashion communication platforms and garment/accessory advertising images. Therefore, celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, Alicia Vikander, Catherine Deneuve, Miley Cyrus, Léa Seydoux, Kristen Stewart, and Emma Stone now visually ‘embody’ iconic fashion houses and designers’

work. As such, the article will argue that this development is the result of the increasingly conflation of the traditional celebrity product endorser role with a more active creative use of bodily image, which is indicative of the intensifying primacy and economic value of celebrity within the modern fashion industry. Conceptually, the article will draw upon celebrity branding literature, but employ the concept of commodified media spectacle, as classically articulated by Guy Debord. Furthermore, the article will apply the idea of media implosion drawn from Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard to explore how the endorser and muse roles have become fused, reflecting a creative and promotional relationship that underscores the multi-faceted centrality of celebrity within the contemporary fashion industry.

The figure of the Muse: from Greek poetry to fashion

Exploring the origins of the muse, Joseph M. Hassett states that the “Greek idea of the Muse is captured in Plato's dictum that “all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art [*techne*] but because they are inspired and possessed” by the Muse, who speaks through the poet” (2010, 1). More commonly, the idea of the Muses signified the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, who was the goddess of memory and whose daughters, the Muses, were young women who inspired diverse artists and responded to the call of poets to assist them in the practice of the arts (Hardie, 2013). As such:

More generally, a muse is “a women or a force, who is the source of inspiration for a creative artist” The metaphor of the muse is a way of expressing the reality that creativity is not simply a matter of will and discipline but requires receptivity and openness (Halling, 2014, 2).

As Mancoff explains, the nine Muses, as identified in Hesiod's *Theogony*, rested at the base of Mount Olympus and sang songs that extolled both the virtues and deeds of the Greek gods and

those of humanity. Hesiod named each of these figures: Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Talia, and Urania, and “called them Muses, from the Greek word *mousai*, or mountain, in honour of their dwelling in the foothills of Mount Olympus. To spark the flame of inspiration, poets would begin their compositions with an invocation to the Muses” (2014, 7-8). Within his critical survey of the figure of the Muse within Greek poetry and drama, Maslov defines them as “deities of poetic craft” and “one who makes possible the poet’s intellectual effort of composition” (2016, 414 & 416). Moreover, while conventionally numbering nine, other Greek depictions numbered Muses as groupings of three, and sometimes as a solitary figure. In this sense, many classic Greek poets and performers came to regard “the Muses as their patron deities” (2016, 420).

In Mancoff’s view, following the ancient Greek era, the Muses evolved to become specific patrons of arts, such as Terpsichore’s relation to dance, and Euterpe’s association with music, but ultimately the muse developed to become a ‘presiding spirit’ linked with all forms of artistic activity, including that of fashion design:

From the first maison de couture in the mid-nineteenth century to the fashion industry of today, the relationship between a designer and his or her muse has been at the heart of the creative process of fashion design. The muse may be a treasured client, a beloved friend, or a creative collaborator. A designer may follow a muse for a season or the relationship may last a lifetime. A muse may have a high public profile as a celebrity or a film star (Mancoff 2014, 12).

This idea of the individual muse as an inspiring force for the creative works of fashion designer is an explicit factor that underpins Koda and Yohannan’s historical overview of the fashion model, with its beginnings linked clearly to Charles Frederick Worth’s employment of Marie

Vernet. Wearing Worth's fashions, Vernet attended prestigious social events to personally advertise Worth's creations, ultimately gaining the attention and subsequent patronage of the Empress Eugénie de Montijo and numerous women within the court of Napoleon III. In acting in this way as both model and a muse to embody and communicate Worth's vision, Vernet would be considered to represent the first professional fashion model (2009, 18). More significantly, as Teri Agins argues, the Empress Eugénie became Worth's next model/muse figure, and drawings of her wearing Worth's designs were subsequently displayed in clothing store windows. Accordingly, Worth's "Eugenie moment" began "the symbiosis between fashion designers and celebrities, which established the very foundation on which high fashion was built" (2014, 2).

As Mancoff, Koda and Yohannan and Agins concur, the showcasing of fashion design from the early 20th century saw the intermingling of professional models and aristocrats, socialites and society figures with an increasing high visible presence of celebrity personalities drawn from popular culture and mass communication mediums. For example, Yves Saint Laurent was described as a "man of many muses" (Borrelli-Persson 2019, 1), but his most famous collaboration was with the French actress Catherine Deneuve. While the designer created personal couture for Deneuve, the relationship resulted in a series of innovative and striking costumes for a number of her key films, such as *Belle de Jour* (1967), *Mississippi Mermaid* (1968), and *The Hunger* (1983). Such was the nature of the relationship that Deneuve "believed that more than any other designer Saint Laurent created character through his costumes, and his wardrobe eased the artistic challenge of 'becoming the someone else an actress has to be'" (Mancoff 2014, 107). However, this celebrity/designer relationship had two distinctive antecedents that illustrated how vital a particular public muse could be not only in the creation of iconic fashion design visions and productions, but also to the value of a designer's public persona and reputation.

Classic celebrity muse/fashion designer relationships: Audrey Hepburn, Givenchy, Jackie Kennedy and Cassini

Early Hollywood costume design established close relationships between studio designers and selected movie stars, such as Edith Head's designs for Dorothy Lamour, and Gilbert Adrian's work with Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn, Gloria Swanson, Bette Davis, and Barbara Stanwyck. However, it was the ensuring relationship between Adrian and Joan Crawford that evoked a distinctive muse/designer association, resulting in the design of costumes for thirty one films between 1929 and 1941, and establishing her signature 'mannish' shoulder-pads look into "a global trend that captivated millions of women throughout the 1940s" (Agin 2014, 4). However, this Hollywood-based muse affiliation would be taken to a higher level in the creative association between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy. With regard to Hepburn, her collaboration with Givenchy, as an actress who was yet to reach full stardom in early 1950s, was such that it effectively "changed the way costuming worked to show how fashion and cinema could transcend the costume department" (Croll 2014, 121). As such, it established a long-running creative relationship that led *American Vogue* to declare: "What fires his imagination races hers. The message he cuts into cloth she beams into the world with the special wit and stylishness of a great star" (Beyfus 2013, 51).

For De La Hoz, although both Givenchy and Hepburn were at the beginnings of their respective careers (Givenchy reportedly assumed he was to be working with Katherine Hepburn), they ultimately made fashion history and popularized iconic garments, to the extent that, due to "Hepburn's unparalleled endorsement on and off screen, Givenchy was able to turn his small couture house into one of luxury's first globally recognized and genuinely successful brands" (Thomas 2007, 106-107). In assessing the impact and legacy of the professional Hepburn/Givenchy partnership, De La Hoz argues that "the looks she wore came to be regarded as "timeless", and she continues to be the ultimate fashion role model for millions around the

world” (2016, 7). Moreover, it was the originality of Hepburn’s look in early 1950s Hollywood that led to the design input of Givenchy, as the dominant costume silhouette being routinely produced by the studio costumiers was geared towards actresses such as Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell, and Elizabeth Taylor. While initially inspired by the couture of Jacques Fath and Cristóbal Balenciaga, Givenchy established his House of Givenchy in 1952, and it was his distinctive couture that was sought out for their first cinematic collaboration, *Sabrina* (1954), and from their first meeting the foundations of the ultimate muse/creator relationship was established:

As she began trying the clothes on, it became apparent that Audrey was an ideal model for Givenchy’s fashions – the clothes fit her perfectly directly off the racks. The synergy between star and designer was affixed...Audrey returned to Hollywood with three Givenchy originals from the designer’s fledgling collection to debut in *Sabrina* (De La Hoz 2016, 19).

While *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) was arguably Hepburn and Givenchy’s most iconic and memorable collaboration, they would work together on a number of films, including *Funny Face* (1957), *Love in the Afternoon* (1957), *Paris When It Sizzles* (1964), and *How To Steal a Million* (1966). The creative partnership was such that, within *How To Steal a Million*, Givenchy was self-referentially mentioned in relation to Hepburn’s onscreen character, an instance that cemented the way in which she played a decisive inspirational role, because:

The mention of Givenchy in the film crystallizes the level of awareness that the partnership of designer and muse had achieved. In the minds of the general public,

Audrey was already a fashion icon, and the man responsible for her look was known to be none other than Givenchy (De La Hoz 2016, 144).

However, it was not merely within Hollywood where this mutually beneficial partnership could occur, and arguably the muse/designer relationship reached a more dramatic level with the second great mid-twentieth century creative partnership, that of Jacqueline Kennedy and Oleg Cassini, an affiliation that “made a lasting impact on the fashion industry and set the tone for a presidency” (Marino 2016, 8). Referring to “Jackie” Kennedy, Garland stressed that the muse’s sense of specific taste and knowledge of how to enhance her own beauty stimulates the designer, for they know “she will show to their best advantage the models she chooses, and that everything she wears will be photographed and reported by the press” (1962, 29-31). As Dunak argues, such press coverage from the late 1950s and early 1960s of Jackie Kennedy focused on her traditional role as a wife and mother, but also extensively on her “elite background and education, cultural acumen, taste and style” (2018, 51). In terms of fashion bravura, when on John F. Kennedy’s campaign trail, Jackie needed to be publically seen to move away from a preference for European designers (such as Balenciaga and Givenchy), and to increasingly favour American fashions. As such, assisted by the expert advice of Diana Vreeland, the then editor of *Harper’s Bazaar*, Oleg Cassini was the recommended choice, and their muse/designer relationship was established, continuing when she became First Lady, to globally influential effect. As Mancoff states:

He admired her taste, respected her personal preference, and even credited her as a partner in the creation of the designs, explaining that “my job is essentially a matter of presenting ideas for her editing”...The informal sophistication of the look also blurred social status. It was a democratic style, and therefore essentially American. Within a few months the “Jackie Look” swept the nation; women all over the United States put

on simple suits and pillbox hats, because everyone wanted to look like Jackie (2014, 162).

In her analysis of the Jackie Kennedy/Oleg Cassini ‘fashion love affair’, Marino argues that Cassini’s background as a Hollywood costume designer in the 1940s and 1950s (working with Edith Head at Paramount studios) was significant, as he understood that Jackie Kennedy was America’s ‘leading lady’. Consequently, Cassini did not provide pre-existing work, but instead set out to create clothes and accessories that were designed specifically in response to her image, persona, and public role. As recalled in relation to the design aesthetic that guided his work: “I was proposing an entire new look, my interpretation of how Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy might want to play the role of First Lady” (2016, 34). From his presentation of the sketch that became Jackie Kennedy’s inauguration gown, Cassini was established as both the “White House couturier” and fashion collaborator, to the extent that he became dubbed the first Presidential ‘Secretary of Style” (2016, 34), ultimately designing three hundred garments over the course of John F. Kennedy’s presidency. Importantly, the relationship was often collaborative, involving Jackie sending Cassini ideas for specific official events that she was to be attending, with the designer offering sketches and fabric swatches for comment, and agreement. In terms of the efficacy of the relationship, the inauguration ensemble, consisting of the fawn beige wool coat and sable collar, matched by the sable muff and completed by the iconic pillbox hat, became the iconic ‘Jackie Look’ that created an instant global sensation. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the inauguration, the effect of this muse/designer partnership was such that:

The “Jackie Look” took hold and women all over the world were clamouring for clothes that would help them look like the First Lady...Seventh Avenue manufacturers and

retailers were quickly producing less expensive copies of all of Jackie's looks. Vogue magazine even devoted an entire issue to Jackie's style (2016, 137).

As Marino notes, Ted Jones, in his 1964 piece for *Woman's Wear Daily*, explicitly articulated the ways in which her style and taste influenced Cassini's designs, which ensured that the Kennedy administration was intimately connected to elegance, and whereby each look was extensively covered by the media with regard to what she wore, and in which social context. Furthermore, their collaborative relationship elevated the status of US fashion design, leading to an export challenge to the previously-dominant European industry, and establishing Cassini, within the early 1960s, as 'the best known name in American Fashion' (2016: 10).

The rise of the celebrity muse/endorser hybrid

In considering his time designing for Jackie Kennedy, Cassini presciently encapsulated his creative period working with her as a decisive moment of cultural shift within the fashion industry. As he reflected on his experience, and its legacy:

When I entered the [White House] through the front door and not the servant's entrance, the status and image of the American Designer changed, thus began the celebritization of fashion...the notion that a designer's very name might be so recognizable as to be marketable began right then and there (Marino 2016, 149).

In the view of Church Gibson, from the 1990s the status of the celebrity fashion designer intensified, with their images being the subject of extensive media coverage, marked by designers such as Karl Lagerfeld creating distinctive 'signature looks' (the ponytail, dark glasses and high, starched collars), establishing Hollywood filmmaking careers, like Tom Ford, or starring in long-running television, such as Michael Kors' role on the fashion-themed Reality

TV show, *Project Runway* (Agin 2014). All of these factors have contributed to a status whereby, as Church Gibson argues, many designers have become “as familiar as the clothes designed, a recognizable brand” (2012: 195). In Pan’s view, and with reference to Celine and Burberry’s hiring of Hedi Slimane and Riccardo Tisci, this has enabled fashion houses to engage in personality-driven branding activity to actively ensure that designers’ “personal preferences and values get firmly woven into brands’ equities and identities” (2018, 3). In terms of fashion muses, while there would be significant designer/celebrity collaborations (Yves Saint Laurent with Catherine Deneuve, Giorgio Armani’s costume designs for Richard Gere in *American Gigolo*, and Jean Paul Gaultier’s distinctive and iconic work with Madonna for her 1990 *Blond Ambition* tour), the onus was less on long-running Hepburn/Givenchy or Kennedy/Cassini-style celebrity relationships and more towards the fashion model, the professional group who, from the 1960s (typified by high-profile models such as Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton), increasingly “became household names and international personalities” (Craik 1993, 85). This process was intensified by the global fame of the 1990s ‘Supermodels’, who established “a symbiotic relationship with fashion houses” (Koda and Yohannan 2009, 15). Thus, models became, as Mancoff argues, the dominant ‘face of fashion’, and the primary muse figures whose images and personas were utilized by designers, as illustrated by Lagerfeld’s professional relationship with Stella Tennant, Karen Elson and Lady Amanda Harlech. Indeed, the Bouvier-Kennedy muse relationship also extended to Jackie’s sister, Lee Radziwill, who, from 1986 to the mid-1990s, formally worked with Giorgio Armani as his prominent ‘image-maker’, ‘showpiece’, and ‘muse’ to showcase Armani’s designs at the various prestigious social events she attended’ (Kashner and Schoenberger 2018).

Drawing upon Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the specialized techniques and embedded knowledge that enable social actors to acquire a sense of the appropriateness of specific cultural goods, body techniques, modes of self-presentation, Craik argues that the fashion model is a

figure that has historically communicated changing perceptions of bodily ideals and ‘self-formation through the body’ (1993, 91). In this sense, the model as muse signifies an idealized bodily form, and one that can, and has, inspired dramatic new looks, as was the case with Kate Moss’ relation with Calvin Klein in 1992. As Callahan states, within this period Calvin Klein was an overextended brand that was near to economic collapse, and the designer “knew it was the young people who were going to get him out of this mess” (2014, 65). In a first meeting with Klein that saw Moss competing against Cindy Crawford to be the face of a new advertising campaign, she appeared wearing Calvin Klein jeans, a t-shirt, unkempt hair and no makeup – the antithesis of the then-dominant ‘supermodel’ look. While possessing an unconventional image, Klein believed that her look would resonate with ‘90s youth. As such: “It was a risk, but Klein went with the kids. “For them, what is real is beautiful – looking plain is beautiful, “Klein said. “What is less than perfect is sexy.” Moss was their muse” (2014: 67). The case of Kate Moss, therefore, arguably supported Mancoff’s contention that the role of the muse within the fashion industry was the preserve of the professional model, because:

With their distinctive looks, enviable proportions, and inimitable walks, they present a designer’s idea to the industry and to the wider world. We see them on magazine covers, billboards, and on the red carpet, setting a standard of beauty and style to which we can only aspire (2014: 110).

Yet, while the role of the fashion muse certainly did seemingly become internalized to a fashion-based inner dynamic, and models are a potent aspect of contemporary celebrity culture, various celebrity figures, drawn from film, television, and popular music have increasingly becoming prominent facets of fashion house brand communication and design approaches. As Agins (2014) argues, a key development has been the increasing number of celebrities who have entered into the fashion industry as producers and designers, such as Mary-Kate and

Ashley Olsen, Victoria Beckham, the Kardashian and Jenner sisters, Rihanna, and Kanye West. However, a more prominent, and economically powerful, expression of celebrity within the fashion industry is the presence of celebrities as brand endorsers and brand ambassadors.

In Robin D. Barnes' definition of celebrity, he stresses that within a contemporary context, while fame was traditionally associated with a specific individual's demonstration of a rare talent or revered singular ability, celebrity "is more transient, relying on marketing, timing, and instant appeal" (2010, 19). Within this perception, image is everything and so, from movie and pop/rock stars, to Reality TV participants "the exorbitance of celebrity's contemporary cultural visibility is unprecedented" (Turner 2014, 4). Therefore, from the perspective of marketing, Finsterwalder, Yee, and Tombs define a celebrity "as a personal or human brand that can be leveraged for its own benefit" (2017, 1205). However, within the context of the economic value of celebrity, it "is also a cultural phenomenon that utilizes consumer's needs for aspiration, belongingness and public intimacy to create a sense of social identification that embeds the consumer within the network of the celebrity" (2017, 1205-1206). This process is geared towards establishing desirable consumer associations with products, brand recall, positive purchasing behaviour, and celebrity-product congruence (Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell, 2011; Yoo and Jin, 2013; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald, 2015). As Uché Okonkwo contends, celebrity personalities are employed within fashion branding in order to strategically "make the brand's message stand out among the clutter of advertising and offerings from competitors; and to convince customers of the credibility of the brand's offerings" (2007: 156), and this is because celebrities are typically regarded as the key cultural trendsetters and major fashion innovators to consumers (Hameide 2011). Consequently, the right celebrity endorser enables a fashion brand to reach global markets, position or re-position a brand and generate considerable PR activity, and can animate a brand clearly for consumers. In this sense then, as Tungate argues of the rationale to employ celebrity endorsers:

The benefits are blinding as a spotlight: stars give brands a well-defined personality for a minimum of effect, and bring with them a rich fantasy world to which consumers aspire. In addition, consumers have a 'history' with stars. Even though they've only seen them on the screen or in the pages of magazines, they form an attachment to celebrities, regarding them as friendly faces and reliable arbiters of taste. Models, with their distant gazes and alien bodies, can't compete (2008, 122).

This conception of the role that celebrities play within the marketing of fashion, with the onus on clearly delineating one fashion house from another through the representation of a celebrity image, evokes Debord's analysis of market-driven capitalism and the 'accumulation of spectacle' that reinforces a system that is characterized by an 'abundance of commodities' in the context of a competitive system in which each "individual commodity fights for itself [and] aspires to impose its presence everywhere as though it were alone" (1995: 43). Within this process, media stars are similarly images to the wider public because they are "spectacular representations of living human beings", and, essentially, "stars of consumption" (1995, 38-39). This status, and the economic impact that it could have, became ever more evident within the fashion industry from the early 1990s as the power of celebrity images in association with designers and garments became progressively paramount. Consequently, as Agins argues, in addition to celebrity-endorsed and name-related products, designers and fashion houses strategically approached stars set for prominent and extensively-mediated red carpet events (principally the Oscars) to wear and promote their designs and so effectively become "celebrity mascots" (2000, 284). Moreover, as Cope and Maloney (2016) observe, from this period the creative relationship between the creative directors of fashion houses and specific celebrity figures intensified, with, significantly, an increased onus on distinctive 'artist-muse' forms that directly echoed that of the Audrey Hepburn/Givenchy relationships. A prominent example of this renewed muse relationship was Marc Jacobs' work with the film director, Sofia Coppola,

with Jacobs initially creating her dress for her award-winning appearance at the 2003 Oscars, but with Coppola subsequently featuring in a number of Marc Jacobs' fragrance campaigns. Similarly, the actress Anne Hathaway formed a creative relationship with Valentino, who designed her 2012 wedding dress, while Raf Simons selected the Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence for a now long-running association with Dior, who effectively serves "as the face of the brand's advertising" (2016, 60).

The ways in which the contemporary muses function is significant, for while they serve as figures of creative inspiration (and so have clear continuities with past muse-figures), there are distinctive differences, as the contemporary fashion muse is much more economically formalized and so represents a multi-faceted version of the Audrey Hepburn/Jackie Kennedy muse relationship. In this regard, the modern muse now frequently represents a hybrid figure of artistic inspirer *and* product endorser. As such, the issues that Okonkwo (2007) argues are crucial to successful brand endorsement and advertising, such as credibility, personality and image constancy are aligned with a more personalized relationship with specific fashion designers, so that the muse embodies both the creative vision of the designer *and* the identity of the fashion house. In this regard, the modern fashion muse signifies the ways in which differing fashion communication and advertising have progressively 'imploded' and so reflect the creative client/designer relationship that was central to Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Kennedy's associations with Givenchy and Cassini, but who also serves as a professional, enumerated ambassador for the fashion house.

This notion of implosion draws upon Marshall McLuhan's (1997) conception of the nature of the progressive supplanting of mechanical technologies with that of electrical media that alters the experience of time and space on a global level and which initiated a process he dubbed the 'electronic implosion' (Merrin 2002). This media-based idea of implosion was significantly developed by Jean Baudrillard in his critical analysis of a media-dominated

culture that now routinely experienced a destabilized and “definitive uncertainty about reality” (1985, 580) due to the impact and influence of such media. For Baudrillard, implosion is that process which signifies the erosion of boundaries, the ‘universe of simulacra without referents’ (Best and Kellner 1991, 121); a space of flux in which the poles of space and time experience ‘a fantastic telescoping, a collapsing of the two traditional poles into one another: an IMPLOSION’ (Baudrillard 1983, 57). While the themes of implosion relate, as William Merrin argues, to issues relating to the distinctive blurring of the lines between reality and image, or truth and falsity, the key concepts of implosion constitute a process of ‘dissolution’ and ‘dissolving’. At one level, this is captured in the ‘hyperreal’ quality of the brand and advertisement images display this implosive feature in terms of the visual representations of muses that reflect a glamorous and aspirational version of fashionable reality predicated upon not “how things actually *are* but of how they *could be*” (Butler 1999, 25). In this sense, the contemporary primacy of the fashion muse arguably represents this implosive tendency in their fusion of personal inspiration and public-facing endorser, and where their public image combines with those of the designers they work with and effectively ‘embody’ within fashion communication platforms and promotional discourses.

The celebrity muse trend: an implosive mix of design inspiration and fashion marketing

As a muse, Marie Vernet served to popularize and advertise the design work of Charles Worth, however, the contemporary muse represents this classic conception as a ‘patron deity’ while also effectively personifying the designer within their own potent celebrity image and globally recognisable star power. Consequently, they have implosively folded the boundaries between the creative and the advertising roles that are intrinsic to celebrity endorsement. As such, this role has now become a pervasive one within modern fashion, to the extent that it almost appears as if no luxury fashion house is now complete without having a high-profile celebrity muse to

creatively inspire design and product representation. In some instances, the relationship can be a focused one, such as that of Adam Selman's work exclusively designing stage-wear for Rihanna (and so echoing the Hepburn and Givenchy relationship), but in other instances the relationship is consciously tagged as being one of the designer and their inspirational 'Muse.' For example, Karl Lagerfeld, in relation to his creative director roles with Chanel and Fendi, engaged with a number of high-profile fashion muses, such as Kate Moss, Cara Delevingne, Cat Power, Lily Allen, Alexa Chung, Lily Rose Depp, and, most enduringly, the actress Kristen Stewart. While ostensibly rising to fame as Bella Swan in the *Twilight* film series, Stewart has subsequently featured in critically-acclaimed work that has resulted in her winning a French César Award for her role in *The Clouds of Sils Maria*. In her position with Chanel, starting in 2013, Stewart has fronted Métiers d'Art collections and key product launches, such as the Gabrielle Chanel perfume and the Gabrielle handbag. However, her relationship with Chanel is a faceted one given her creative role within Karl Lagerfeld's fashion film series devoted to Gabrielle Chanel. While ostensibly a brand ambassador for Chanel, whose image and public persona cuts through the 'market clutter' (Newton 2016), fashion journalists have nevertheless formally referred to her as "the beauty muse for the rue Cambon house" (Bladt 2017, 1). Furthermore, *Nylon* draws clear links with the classic function of the muse, stating in a headline piece: "It's no secret that Kristen Stewart has been the face and inspiration behind some of Karl Lagerfeld's biggest ad campaigns" (Nazim 2017, 1).

In Stewart's earlier role with Balenciaga, serving as the face of the women's scent, Florabotanica, Coty Prestige senior vice president, Catherine Walsh stated that 'her elegant modernity and innate rebel style' seamlessly reflected "the spirit of Balenciaga" (Naughton 2012: 2), stressing the ways in which a brand endorser's image and personality must match that of the identity of the brand. However, Balenciaga's then creative director, Nicolas Ghesquière, explicitly saw her, in relation to a personality that is "full of dualities – gorgeous and boyish"

(Weill 2012, 2), as a distinctive muse figure, stating that the actress embodied “the modernity of the new Balenciaga fragrance with her unique sensibility and intelligence”, and that she fully shared “the radical spirit of Balenciaga” (Naughton 2012, 2). This creative association with specific inspirational celebrity figures would become intrinsic to Ghesquière’s work as creative director with Louis Vuitton from 2013, with the role of brand ambassador increasingly seen by fashion commentators as possessing muse characteristics. As O’Hagan states:

Ghesquière considers himself lucky to have strong partners at Louis Vuitton, people whose daring permits him to take the energy and the craft of old couture and make it new. "I'm talking about our ambassadors," he told me...He means his muses—the actresses Sasha Lane and Rila Fukushima...Catherine Deneuve, Léa Seydoux, as well as [Michelle] Williams and [Alicia] Vikander—women who embody the ethos that matters to him. "These girls are not scared. They don't just want to wear a boring dress on every red carpet." (2017, 1).

In this context, while the Louis Vuitton muses front major advertising campaigns, Ghesquière also produces couture for his ambassador/muses, such as designing Oscar event couture for Michelle Williams and Alicia Vikander, and so illustrating that the personalized muse relationship of Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Kennedy is contemporaneously evident. As such, the key issue of matching personality to brand identity is paramount within the designer/muse relationship. As Chloe Atkins observes with the muse figures that Jeremy Scott works with, such as Miley Cyrus, Katy Perry, Paris Hilton and Nicki Minaj, whereby they exhibit a visual and personality-based sense of the exuberant that keenly reflect Moschino’s penchant for styles that communicate a distinctively ‘kitsch’ and a “fluoro-bright magnetism” (2018, 2). However, perhaps the ‘implosive’ nature of the muse role linking with a designer’s fashion aesthetic and

marketing power is most significantly illustrated by Olivier Rousteing's use of convergent social media platforms that are at the forefront of Balmain's digital marketing strategies, and the central part that celebrities play as part of the 'Balmain army'. As Imran Amed states, it is this celebrity collective, consisting of:

Kanye West, Kim Kardashian-West, Rihanna, Rosie Huntington-Whitely and a score of other instantly recognisable, Insta-famous figures — that has enabled Balmain to raise its global brand awareness, reaching a new, young audience, quite different to the house's 'Jolie Madame' roots (2015, 1).

The key impact of these figures, argues Amed, is that their combined Instagram followings number in the hundreds of millions, far exceeding the number of followers that fashion houses such as Chanel and Givenchy's official Instagram sites attract, and so maximising Balmain's global consumer reach and brand visibility. In this sense, the 'Balmain army' combine ambassador, endorser and modelling roles as part of Rousteing's vision of "making sure that the name of the brand is something that every continent will know" (2015, 1). They are chosen because of their personalities, and, most importantly, how these creatively gel with the Balmain brand, whether it is within social media-based platforms, or, the ways in which their image and bodies capture a design collections aesthetic, as is the case with Rousteing's choice of Cara Delevingne to represent Balmain's Spring/Summer 2019 couture division revival (Newbold 2019). The key issue, however, is that Rousteing specially refers to the Balmain ambassadors as 'muses'. As such, in commenting upon the importance of muses to Balmain, and his close creative relationship with Reality TV star Kim Kardashian in this context, Rousteing states:

I choose muses that are actually really different and modern – I chose them because they are contemporary, they are part of this new world...For example, Kim Kardashian. She's my friend, she's a woman that I love for different reasons...I also think she's pushing boundaries when it comes to the female form. I love dressing her she's a different body type to the models on my catwalk – she's part of my world (Lindig 2015, 2 & 4).

Speaking of the classic relationship between the Greek poet and the Muse, Hardie states that “while the poem may be the product of a collaborative effort in which the Muses inspire, inform, and remind, it remains the final product of the poet's own mind” (2013, 224). However, as he also adds, a ‘Muse shows the way and illuminates her poet's strategic purposes’ (2013, 240). With reference to Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Kennedy, their relationships with Givenchy and Cassini re-echoed this conception of the Muse, whereby the personalities, images, identities and ideas directly influenced the final garments, and the creative ideas that underpinned them, and these relationships were protracted and mutually beneficial. As Audrey Hepburn stated:

Givenchy's creations always gave me a sense of security and confidence, and my work went more easily in the knowledge that I looked absolutely right. I felt the same at my private appearances. Givenchy's outfits gave me ‘protection’ against strange situations and people. I felt so good in them (De La Hoz 2016, 165).

In this sense, the contemporaneous ‘return of the muse’ within fashion represents a process of both continuity and change. There is clear continuity in that designers such as Marc Jacobs, Nicolas Ghesquière, and Olivier Rousteing have forged enduring creative partnerships with

celebrities who inspire their work, but the changes come in the ways in which muses have multi-faceted roles, and in many aspects, their inspirational contributions see them enhancing the communication of fashion houses. In this respect, the modern muse is an implosive combination of the celebrity brand ambassador, image/personality-driven brand endorse, and personalized source of inspiration for the artist/designer. Of course, Marie Vernet, Charles Worth's model/muse, was a personalized marketing figure for his fashion house, so the resurgence of the prevailing muse is returning to the inception of modern couture, and the status of the celebrity fashion designer.

Conclusion: celebrity muses and poetic marketing

Akin to the ancient Greek Muse tradition, it is significant that modern fashion muses are similarly overwhelmingly female (with some rare exceptions, such as the musician Pharrell William's work with Karl Lagerfeld and Jaden Smith's association with Nicolas Ghesquière). In this sense, the contemporary muse could be viewed as a modern expression, and reinforcement of, a distinctive gender stereotype. For instance, in Marina Warner's (1981) typology of historical roles for women that have signified restriction, she lists wife, mother, mistress, and, tellingly, muse. Similarly, Ina Seethaler argues that traditionally a "muse is known for inspiring artists, especially men, but agency is not one of her primary characteristics. Usually, little is known of a muse's life beyond her artistic encouragement" (2018, 39). However, the fashion muse differs markedly from this passive appraisal, given that, due to their celebrity status, *much* is known of their lives beyond their work with fashion houses, and their achievements are considerable given that the fashion muse is found at the apex of the fame hierarchy and so typically accord with Rojek's (2001) 'achieved' celebrity category. Indeed, the contemporary fashion muses' fame invariably eclipses that of the designer as they possess global renown and international recognisability. Moreover, the muse role often developments into creative partnerships, as has been the case with Tommy Hilfiger's muse relationships with

Gigi Hadid and Zendaya. Therefore, while the inspirational function may connect to Zeus' Muses, the celebrity fashion muse is not without agency.

In Debord's critical analysis, within a capitalist market economy, each "individual commodity fights for itself...and aspires to impose its presence everywhere as though it were alone. The spectacle is the epic poem of this strife" (1995, 43). In terms of the primacy of the muse, the cultural visibility of celebrity figures within fashion brand communications, digital platforms, and designers' creative visions can be perceived as an evolution in brand marketing in this regard. As such, the fashion muse, the celebrity figure whose image adorns brand communication, social media output, advertising, and candid pictures with iconic fashion house creative directors, plays an intrinsic role within this 'poetic' process. Consequently, Agins' view that the modern fashion industry is one in which "the line between celebrity and fashion designer have become blurred" (2014: xv) is now further represented in the addition of the muse to the pantheon of celebrity endorser, ambassador, and designer. Furthermore, this implosive presence and relationship shows no signs of diminishing, because celebrities now no longer merely sell and promote fashion, they increasingly *inspire* it.

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