

SILVER CUBE

Tom Holert

Transfusion

A magnificent photograph by Eve Arnold from 1956 portrays the encounter of two stars from separate worlds in the common ground of New York's Guggenheim Museum. The beautiful Italian film actress Silvana Mangano, at an early peak in her fame, stands before a work by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi, staring with concentration at the gleaming, polished neck of *Mlle Pogany* (1913). The bust rests on a marble plinth and the actress, whose silhouette corresponds with Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1918) in the background, appears to be involved in a wordless dialogue with the art object. A possible subject for such an exchange could be: what does it actually mean to be a model for a photographer? For it is not only Mangano, the film actress here staged before the camera, but also Brancusi's "haute sculpture".¹ Brancusi's sculpture provided a setting for fashion displays as early as 1912, when Paul Poiret decorated his Paris salon with a polished Brancusi bronze and it was used for lavish stagings by the artist himself and other photographers.

Edward Steichen for instance, who constantly moved between artistic and commercial photography, had begun to photograph Brancusi and his sculptures early on. Following his pictorialist period Steichen, in the 1920s and 1930s, did not just photograph models and celebrities from high and popular culture; he also moved onto other subjects, objects and plants, or even Brancusi sculptures, which he began to photograph in the spectacularised modus of the glamour shot.

In this way Steichen (circa 1925) staged an unearthly epiphany of a polished bronze version of Brancusi's *Bird in Space*. The sculpture stretches in a niche of light and shadow toward the light source above – which is either a skylight or a spotlight. The chiaroscuro modelling renders a mystically mysterious, slim sculptural plasticity recalling images of the *femme fatale* or an uncanny villain from films of the period. At the same time the eccentric composition radiates an elegant and opulent composure, foreshadowing the glamour photography Steichen was to produce of stars such as Marlene Dietrich in the coming years.

Brancusi took photographic stagings of his work very seriously, and he not only calculated certain plastic effects with photographic reproduction in mind, he actually composed photographs himself. In Steichen, he found an eclectic all rounder with no qualms about working in the commercial sphere. Both were quite happy to consciously transgress the borders of modern art and the culture industry to blend purism of form with the gloss of the grand entrance. Thirty years later the Magnum photographer Eve Arnold may have been well aware of this connection. At any rate, the manner in which she brought together Mangano and Brancusi in the picture intimates how the two (and the institutional fields they "represent") interact. Like the Jackson Pollock paintings Cecil Beaton photographed with female models a few years earlier for a fashion story about "The New Soft Look" for the US edition of *Vogue*, from March 1, 1951, the work finds itself in the change-inducing area of mass media glamour production, bound into an oddly conspiratorial "conglamouration". Beaton's Pollock photographs are a classic example of the unresolved relationship between artistic and glamorous practice, for a "transfusion" of which the film critic Frieda Grafe has spoken with regard to glamour (see below). In retrospect the Pollocks and the *Vogue* models appear to fit far more naturally in a common image of a period when glamour is being cut adrift from its origins. Even though the tension between art and glamour retains its terseness, it is today, in the wake of the last peak of debate in the 1990s regarding art's relation to fashion,² far easier to gain an insight into this reciprocal vampirism, this peculiar partnership in the economy of attention. Nonetheless the relationship remains problematic.

No simple relationship

"El arte contra el glamour" ("Art versus Glamour"), reads the title of an article in the Spanish cultural magazine *El Cultural*. The accompanying text presaged exhibitions by up-and-coming curators who concerned

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1 See Reinhold Hohl, Die „Haute Sculpture“ [1986], in: *Skulptur. Von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart. 15. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, Cologne: Taschen 1999, p. 435.
2 See for instance Jack Bankowsky, Editor's Letter : The Art/Fashion Thing, and Bruce Hainly, All the Rage The Art/Fashion Thing, in: *Artforum*, Vol. 34, No.7, March 1996, p. 2, and pp. 70-78.

themselves with street art and the symbiosis of art and science. "In this time of exhibitions à la mode, of glamorous galerists, of grand openings and curators who have transformed themselves into elegant machines of art commission, it is a relief", sighs the author, "to see young exhibition organisers searching for a truth about art, rather than observing art merely as a medium".³

In this construction of glamour as the Other of art, the fear of a dangerously seductive magic phenomenon makes itself felt, one of the very properties concealed in the actual etymology of the word "Glamour".⁴ Where glamour enters into an alliance with art, it stands symbolically for the decline into obsequious commercialism and political opportunism. Glamour becomes a symptom of the collapse of and dissolving into a visual culture determined by economic principles. Art as such can be utilised for advertising and consumerism when a product requires "a connotation of prestige, tradition and authenticity".⁵

An exhibition such as *The Future Has a Silver Lining*, dedicated as it is to the relationship of art and glamour, thus deals with an open secret and moves about in extensive territory that is largely unmapped. For between the institution of art and the aesthetic categories of the glamorous exist relations historic and geographic, between form and content, which are absolutely different from each other.

Glamour can be both a function and effect of the art system. It might describe a quality of a particular art work, but also be the object of an artistic practice and within this practice be aesthetically worked upon. In relation to art from, at the latest, the 1980s, the time when media-savvy artists like Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst began to enter the art world, significantly more is articulated in terms of the "glamour factor" or "glamorisation potential". Such terminologies make of glamour a property with which one actively endows or encompasses, for instance, the concept of "art". Contrary to this understanding of glamour as a detachable accessory is the mute expression on a person's face who has just experienced a personality or an event, in which the glamour is not a visual extra. Instead the gloss, shimmering, or spell (three meanings of the word "glamour"), appear to be inherent even where the make-up is really thick.

This last inherent glamour, which should not be confused with an ominous glamour-from- within but with that which some would call authentic, is far more difficult to produce or control than the rented glamour, with which event managers and other alleged glamour professionals trouble themselves. One of the most interesting contradictions of glamour is contained in the fact that it is on the one hand the synonym for radical artificiality and fabrication, but on the other hand it has long since been impossible to reliably programme – especially when the expectations of a grand entrance have been increased by previous experiences of inherent glamour. Today few would argue against the existence of an art/glamour nexus, even though this relationship is not free from conflict. The art world boldly takes it for granted that it creates "glamorous" situations of the above-mentioned kind, and it is not a rare occasion to witness art serving as the scenery or in fact the "medium" for other, somewhat more political and economic interests. Lavish social stagings in museums and galleries, at trade fairs and auctions are the order of the day even in times of economic crisis. With the opening of new museum buildings, the staging of a Biennial, or a blockbuster exhibition, municipal authorities and sponsors attempt to exploit culture economics to the maximum. Institutions of high culture make their infrastructures available for fashion, pop music, or film, while the mass media, for their part, are increasingly aware of how they should value the art experience. Today, in magazines or on TV, decades after Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein, Kiki de Saint-Phalle or Andy Warhol made their occasional entrance into the jet-set, star artists but also star curators, art commissioners and other protagonists of the artistic field are reported on, and in a way also taken for granted, as part of the celebrity line-up. Glamour has become second nature to art.

Motivations

However, although the above characterisation appears at first glance to state the case effectively it is, in fact, all too brief. In both cases it concerns entities (of a very different type) that do not cease to change themselves. And in changing they also alter their relationships. This dynamic should not be buried beneath the construction of a linear narrative referring to some origins of glamour or art and their relations. Far more interesting would be to reconstruct the genealogies, the strands of the term of the glamorous and the various glamour-practices within the cultural texture of the twentieth century without numbing the inner tension or laying the many conflicts to rest.

Yet what motivates such interest and procedures? The deciding factors with which one must be concerned, the pasts and presents, origins and perspectives of the glamorous are to be sought in individual, intimate or (semi-) public experiences of glamour. Many can tell of such experiences: being present in splendid social and spatial surroundings; witnessing an unexpected and risky gesture of resistance against official consensus; encountering "glamorous" personalities either in their immediate presence or on the stage and screen. Events which for their graceful casualness or breathtaking rarity remain in the memory: moments in which suddenly everything is right and one no longer needs to question why.

3 „En estos tiempos de exposiciones *fashion*, galeristas glamorosos, curators convertidos en elegantes máquinas de comisariat y vernisajes de buen tono [...]“ (José Marín-Medina, *El arte contra el glamour*, in: *El Cultural*, 22 July 2004, p. 29).

4 *Webster's Dictionary*, 1913: \Gla'mour\, n. [Scot. Glamour, glamor; cf. Icel. Gil[']a]meggr one who is troubled with the glaucoma (?); or Icel. Gil[']m-s[']ni weakness of sight, glamour; gl[']a]mr name of the moon, also of a ghost [...] Perh., however, a corruption of E. Gramarye.] 1. A charm affecting the eye, making objects appear different from what they are; 2. Witchcraft; magic; a spell; 3. A kind of haze in the air [...]; 4. Any artificial interest in, or association with, an object, through which it appears delusively magnified or glorified [...]; a famous definition originated from Sir Walter Scott: 'Glamour, in the legends of superstition, means the magic power of imposing on the eyesight of the spectators, so that the appearance of the object shall be totally different from the reality' (in an annotation for Scott's poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* from 1802).

5 Marita Sturken/Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001, p. 213.

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Glamour could function as an ideal of personality, self-assurance and communality to which one is oriented and about which one feels euphoric. Often glamour may not even be located at the centre of attention but instead serves as a kind of supplement. In these cases the glamorous shows itself in retrospect as a feature of distinction by which normality is inscribed with a wonderful deviance, as a “slight slippage” of which Giorgio Agamben speaks in the context of messianism and the “coming community”. Here the decisive changes do not lie in the things themselves but at their edges where it is “shimmering” as a potency – similar to the aureole of an elected saint which radiates a little more but does not signify a substantial difference compared to other aureoles, it merely grants the state of bliss an extra “shimmer” (clarior).⁶

Alongside such minute differences, which empower and provide happiness, and which one can interpret as proof of love, as evidence of a special love and care, deeply distressing experiences are also associated with glamour. Glamour operates continually as a cool-seductive norm under which one is subjugated by a phantom yet intense state of anxiety. As well as the promise of happiness and the blissful dimension of the glamorous, there exists a fatal fascination in which the glamorous proves to be a discipline, a pressure, an ordering power affecting the struggle between art and glamour. A possibility with which to frame this contestation could now lie in stretching the art/glamour relationship on the cobbler’s last through amply discussed polarities such as “avant-garde and kitsch” or “high and low”. This way one would be tempted to follow the dichotomy of “art versus glamour” all too readily as the ideal solution to a notion of art liberated from the excessive and heteronomous demands of the glamorous.

Thinking of glamour as endangering the integrity of art, however, provides a stimulus of its own. Through this, the category so bound to the surface which Clement Greenberg, the nestor of modernism, once described as “inhuman” could become one of the central challenges and oppositions of modernism. What if glamour, as the aesthetic adaptation of the principle of “social construction”, confronts the autonomy and self-referentiality of the artwork not only with the vulgarity of a display of bodily beauty, social superiority and economic wealth, but at another level puts into question the self-indulged dichotomy of semblance and being? And additionally, begin irritating other problems of the construction and deconstruction of identity.

Glamour and semblance

In a renowned section of his *Ästhetische Theorie* Theodor W. Adorno discussed the problem of “semblance”. Instead of rejecting the aesthetic semblance as mere illusion and mediation, Adorno emphasises the dialectics of modernist art as the attempt to shake off the “character of semblance” like “animals a grown antler”.⁷ The suspicion of the semblance-loaded artwork refers back to ideas of a literal, substantial, pure art and ignores the immanent character of semblance, the constitutive “phantasmagorical side of artworks” in modernism, which in the age of technological amplification is “the illusion of the being-in-itself of the work”.⁸ Semblance for Adorno is integral to art. His dialectics operate in the dissonance between semblance and the rebellion against it. As they retain and rescue “semblance” they also rescue the work of art by liberating it from the pretensions associated with its own import. The dialectics of semblance reckon with an aesthetic moralism that tries to accuse semblance of stagings, arrangements and lies. And of course Adorno knows of what he speaks, he is after all the sharpest, but also the most understanding critic of the semblance of “autonomy” (of the work of art and the artistic sphere), which resists the “total” or “ubiquitous” semblance of the capitalist social order.⁹

From semblance which puts the abstract, not-being spirit “as the existent” in the artwork “before your eyes”,¹⁰ one must distinguish “gloss” (“Glanz”). Both have the same origin in the Old High German “skin”. But the philosophical meaning of “semblance” (especially as Hegel talks of it as the sensually shining idea in the artwork) should not be confused with the meaning of “gloss” which Adorno utilises for his cultural critique. Gloss indicates the commodity form. Glossy is the hall of mirrors in the department store. Glossy and glittery are those spectacular moments in a jazz or swing song which Adorno in 1941 called “musical glamor”, those “innumerable passages in song arrangements which appear to communicate the ‘now we present’ attitude”.¹¹ In fact, the culture itself makes an effort to acquire gloss. The truth about this “gloss of culture” is, for Adorno, made visible by those who refuse to surrender to the glamour norm who, in defence of the “archetypes of the vulgar”, of the “grinning advertising beauties”, “blacken the all-too-white teeth”.¹²

At the moment he changes from semblance to gloss, Adorno also changes the gender register (which previously had not played any role in his discussion). The critique of the “vulgar”, of the “sellable emotion”, which is nothing other than “a subjective identification with the objectively reproduced humiliation”, activates images of “grinning advertising beauties” and an excessive amount of “female gloss”. However, this alleged “female gloss” is, under the premise of technologically amplified phantasmagoria, the domain of the glamour aesthetic which had been developed since the 1920s forming the grammar of the glamour shot – by photographers such as Alfred Cheney Johnston, Ruth Harriet Louise, Laszlo Willinger, Ted Allen, Clarence Sinclair Bull, George Hurrell, Otto Dyar and others in Hollywood. In an exchange with the illustrated fan magazines of the movie industry such as *Motion Picture*, *Movie Life*, *Movie Star Parade*, *Photoplay*, *Screenland* or *Screen Stars* the studio photographers hired by MGM or Warner Bros programmed a specific, quasi-sculptural perception of stars as figures born of light and shadow.¹³ Centred around the concept (and the code) of “glamour” they started with the “artificial building of ‘personality’” which Walter Benjamin has described as

6 Giorgio Agamben, *Die kommende Gemeinschaft* [2001], translated from the Italian by Andreas Heipko, Berlin: Merve 2003, p. 53.
7 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1973, p. 157.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 337.
10 Ibid., p. 165.
11 Theodor W. Adorno (with George Simpson), On Popular Music, in: *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, Vol. IX, 1941, pp. 17-48, here 28.
12 See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 356-7.
13 See David Fahey/Linda Rich, *Masters of Starlight. Photographers in Hollywood*, New York: Ballantine 1987, pp. 14-15.

the “shrinking of the aura”, the means by which – unsuccessfully – the “magic of personality” was to be preserved.¹⁴ In 1939 one of the first sociologists of film, Margaret Farrand Thorp, confirmed on the basis of her research into fan magazines, “that the most important thing for a glamorous star to have to-day is personality”. Thorp adds: “The insistence on this in the midst of a standardised society is touching”.¹⁵

Effects of de-familiarisation

In a famous photograph that Edward Steichen took of Marlene Dietrich in 1935, the staging of the quintessential representative of Hollywood glamour is organised as a contrast-rich display of black-and-white gradations. The gaze is drawn from the white upholstered chair-back to the black, both anatomically compressed and seemingly stretched torso of the actress, up to the face, framed by arms and an enormous hat; half-opened eyes, slightly sleepy, hold the gaze as the viewer’s belated realisation increases the magnetism of her stare. The fixing point of the composition, however, is the woven, slightly sequined hat, upon which a shimmering light reflects, and continues and concentrates the lascivious, superior expression of Dietrich. It is a sophisticated almost surrealist construction of glamour, which appears virtually de-naturalised or even monstrous. With regards to photography, it seems to correspond perfectly with the iconic-fetishist image of the “isolated, glamorous, displayed, sexualised” woman in the movies, described by Laura Mulvey in her classic essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. The film in which such an image appears is catapulted from the moment of “the sexual impact of the performing woman” into “a no man’s land outside its own time and space”. The illusion and the narrative would be disruptive in favour of “flatness” or the “quality of a cut-out or icon”.¹⁶ Mulvey, however, does not celebrate this moment of the destruction of the filmic time-space as a proto-feminist triumph. Instead she claims that the image of the glamorous woman in the picture triggers either a fetishistic male scopism or a sadistic humiliation – two reactions to cope with the castration anxiety caused by the woman’s iconicity.

But just how passive is the image of the glamorous woman or the glamorous image of woman surrendered to the active male gaze, in fact? Do the medium, the technology and the discourse of the glamorous work favour, without exception, a heterosexist, patriarchal, sadistic voyeurism? However justified the feminist critique of the fetishist-sadistic gaze construction in Hollywood films may be, it appears that the glamorous is not sufficiently encompassed, either in its fascination structure or in its actual offers of agency.

Mulvey outlines these potentials again when she speaks of the loss of the ego moment in cinema, of the suspension of perspectival illusionary space through the presence of glamorously photographed stars. The deception of the glamorous staging overlays the basic deception of illusionism and narrative fiction. This also means: glamour moments can have the effect of de-realising, similar to the de-familiarisation effect, thus transcending the material reality of the apparatus.

Behind this transcending there is a specific conception of (authoritarian) authorship. Glamour is the product of a strong artistic will, a demiurgic force – at least as it appears from the perspective of some glamour producers. Edward Steichen’s photograph makes no secret of the intrusion of the photographer and the power he possesses over his models. Josef von Sternberg, the director who “made” Marlene Dietrich (“Marlene, that’s me”), talks frankly of the torture required for the calm poses he demanded from his star. But Von Sternberg also writes that glamour is an “elastic concept” a “visual stimulant” as if made of soap bubbles. It is not the “object before the lens”, but rather the artist who manipulates the model and exhibits it in light who is responsible for the “glamour of photography”.¹⁷

Not without reason did Von Sternberg locate his image of glamour power, of a one-sided and exercised manipulation, and his formulation of glamour as an “elastic concept”, as “playfully flowing values” and elaborate arrangements, in a spiritual realm. The relationship of empowerment and disempowerment, of authorship and agency, of activity and passivity in glamour – considered as an “elastic concept” – does not always hand the culture critic the right to dub glamour merely “inhuman” or hold it responsible for deep sensations of envy and subjugation.

Without being a mere apologist for a dubious image of glamour authorship, the film critic Frieda Grafe came closer to Von Sternberg in a surprising way. In a 1998 lecture on Von Sternberg’s *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935) she stated that the director had further developed the “photographic beauty concept” into “glamour”, “his camera-produced beauty formula”.¹⁸ Although this appears to reduce everything to a technologically produced glow of women, for Grafe the attraction of this glamour is not unambiguous. She discovered something in Von Sternberg:

“...till then invisible, a kind of condensed aura, which evokes visual effects, which in their fusions are no longer to be described as gender specific and which must come from an externalised interiority. Via mechanical reproduction the unconscious steps into the realm of the visible and thereby achieves the status of consciousness. Assisted by Marlene, with her extremely professional bodily commitment Sternberg produced glamour, creating a new image of femininity which affected both masculine and feminine imagination.”¹⁹

This new sexuality has little to do with diva admiration. In the eyes of her director Marlene Dietrich appears as female impersonator: “Sternberg always saw her in drag” (Grafe), that is why Dietrich’s dresses,

14 Walter Benjamin, Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, in: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1-2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1974, p. 492.

15 Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies* [1939], with an introduction by J.P.Mayer, London: Faber and Faber 1946, p. 51.

16 Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema [1975], in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Houndmills: MacMillan 1989, pp. 14-26, here 19-20.

17 The Von Sternberg Principles, in: *Esquire*, No.250, Vol.40, October 1963 (translated as: Josef von Sternberg, Glamor, in: *Film kritik*, Vol. 13, No. 2, February 1969, pp. 130-132.

18 Frieda Grafe, Die Haut vom Kino. Zu *The Devil Is a Woman* von Josef von Sternberg [1998], in: Frieda Grafe, *Filmfarben. Ausgewählte Schriften in Einzelbänden*, 1, Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 2002, p. 103.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

her men's suits and her gowns formed an important part of the artificiality of her appearance, but also became "circumstantial evidence of a deeply grounded crisis". "Glamour, in that of Sternberg's achieved uniqueness", writes Grafe, "is bisexual, an effect of opposing principles, for which all possible principles are offered – light/shadow, idea/form, inside/outside – whose transfusion, which occurs through the dynamics of the moving pictures, result in a glittering totality".²⁰

The phrase "glittering totality" quite effectively – perhaps particularly in distinction from Adorno's "total semblance" – demonstrates how much that is still unresolved is contained in the concept of the glamorous, and how difficult it is to determine unambiguously the functions of the glamorous as well as the glamorous-as-function. The glamour transfusions set in motion a transformation of (sexual) identity, or perhaps even its dissolution. The construction of the flat, iconic, cut-out image of which Laura Mulvey speaks, can at the same time be a deconstruction, the opening up of a space of unforeseen subjectivities and communalities.

Alien glamour

Glamour has been and is, perhaps because of these very possibilities, time and again in the past and present, the reference point of sub-cultural, bohemian, dissident communities, in which those principles of construction are analysed and new effects can be experimented with. Glamour – in particular an historically evolved glamour – can always be a resource for acts of resistance. The American performance artist Jacki Apple in conversation with artist Mike Kelley on feminist art practice of the 1960s and 1970s looks back: "So the question was, could power exist within the same framework as beauty as defined by the culture at large – as glamour?" And the answer lay in a turning back to past models of a "coalition" of power and beauty, "so the place we had to go back to for that coalition, that merging, of power and beauty was basically to the films of the '40s – to the powerful, glamorous movie stars of the '40s".²¹

Searching not for models of power and beauty, but rather for subtexts of classical Hollywood glamour are the underground cinema and performances of Jack Smith. Since the late 1950s Smith has oriented himself, amongst other things, to a "visual revelation", which he found that the old master of glamour fabrication, Josef von Sternberg had always preferred to "story telling".²² For Smith, Von Sternberg's "visual fantasy world" was precisely not the model of technical perfection but rather of the imperfect, but therefore unique and personal expression of an idiosyncratic value system. Smith's "Montezland" or "Cinemaroc", is an ersatz or meta Hollywood. Not only a fantasy world, but rather a production context, a field of independent practice. Here Smith let his lay actors, his creatures, the immediate predecessors of the superstars of Warhol's Factory, erect tableaux of orgiastic transgression in films like *Flaming Creatures* (1962–63) or *Normal Love* (1963–64). What emerged was "an entirely new form of cine-glamour – one that owed everything and nothing to Hollywood's", as J. Hoberman writes.²³

Thereby the handed down texts of glamour have been deconstructed – what was concealed in them was turned inside out and emphasised: "visual texture, androgynous sexual presence, exotic locations" (P. Adams Sitney);²⁴ the result was carnevalesque, but it was also a deeply and seriously intended travesty of glamour: "Contact with something we are not, know not, think not, feel not, understand not" and because of which presents itself as "an expansion".²⁵

To think of glamour in this sense, as a medium or method, to detach oneself from the discipline which glamour in fact is, makes of it an aesthetic category of a carnivalist state of exception. "Glamorous Rapture, schizophrenic delight, hopeless naïveté and glittering technological trash!"²⁶ confronts the aesthetic code, the "grammar" of the manufacture of figures of light and gloss effects, with the suspension of this system of rules and with the disfunctionalisation of the respective knowledge. In this way Jack Smith's admiration of "illegitimate" models like Josef von Sternberg or Maria Montez, like the performances of the bearded cross dressers and hippy women in the San Francisco theatre group The Cockettes of the late 1960s early 1970s, or Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company, may be considered a project of the redefinition of glamour as the expression of "alien" glamour.²⁷ Glamorous – at least in the USA – was (and still is) synonymous with undeclared homosexuality, with (European) decadence, with the feminine. Hence glamour, when it broke out of these designated lines, became threatening to a patriarchal, heterosexist societal order. Traditionally the beauty industry directed the appeal of glamour to women; they form the major target group for fashion magazines and cosmetic adverts, for exhortations to dieting and cosmetic surgery intervention; they are manipulated up and down with short-term consumer wish-fulfilment and then denied any recently purchased leisure feeling as soon as a new product has to be bought. Women, as Daniel Harris formulates, are today, through the fashion and cosmetic industry, objectified into "kinetic sculptures", while "sex appeal" has been substituted by a pure *aesthetic* vision of their selves.²⁸ One is entitled to agree with such tendentially misogynist observations, should one wish

20 Ibid, p. 106.

21 Quoted from Mike Kelley, Cross-Gender/Cross-Genre[1999/2000], in Mike Kelley, *Foul Perfection. Essays and Criticism*, edited by John C. Welchman, Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press 2003, pp. 102-120, here pp. 118-119 (footnote 41)

22 Jack Smith, Belated Appreciation of V.S. [1963], in: J. Hoberman/Edward Leffingwell (eds.), *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool. The Writings of Jack Smith*, New York/London: High Risk/P.S.1 1997, pp.41-43, here: 42. Ibid, p. 43.

23 J. Hoberman, *On Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures (and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc)*, New York: Granary/Hips Road 2001, p. 10.

24 P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The Avant-Garde 1943-1978*, 2nd Edition, New York: Oxford University Press 1979, p. 353.

25 Jack Smith, The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez [1962], in: Hoberman/Leffingwell (ed.), *Wait For Me at the Bottom of the Pool*, pp. 25-35, here: 34.

26 Ibid., p. 26.

27 For the connections between queer New Yorkers and West Coast underground contexts of the 1950s to the 1970s between Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, the Cockettes, Glamrock and Charles Ludlam, see the reader of the event Re-Make/Re-Model documented during the Steirische Herbst in Graz 1999: Dierich Diederichsen, Christine Frisinghelli, Christoph Gurk, Matthias Haase, Juliane Reben-tisch, Martin Saar, Ruth Sonderegger (eds.), *Golden Years. Materialien und Positionen zu Subkultur und Avantgarde zwischen 1959 und 1974*, Graz: Edition Camera Austria, 2006.

28 Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic. The Aesthetics of Consumerism*, New York: Da Capo 2000, p. 230.

to. Nonetheless, however, this does significantly underestimate the carnevalesque dimension of glamour. For instance, the use of costumes in classical Hollywood has enabled women to parody social differences, reverse them and denaturalise them, as Sarah Berry, writing in a study of the fashion consumer system of the 1930s demonstrated.²⁹ This is similarly valid for other appropriations of the glamour repertoire. From this point of view glamour is not just a technology of social control, but also an instrument of social change.

Semantic cycles

The astounding contradictoriness and mobility of the glamour concept is also grounded in the history of its wavering acceptance and cultural embedding. "Glamour is a subject that always sells. It is a difficult quality to describe. Ask ten people what glamour is and you'll receive ten different answers."³⁰ This mild paradox, which even today many people would agree with, was stated by the photographer Peter Gowland who in the 1950s produced female pin-ups and in 1957 published *How to Take Glamour Photos*. A handbook for nude photography bearing the idea "glamour" in its very title indicates how the meaning of glamour had shifted from its earlier manifestation – the overall expression of that very aura in which Norma Shearer, Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford or Katherine Hepburn lingered as ultimate embodiments of that strangely ungraspable, indefinable quality of the glamorous.

That in the 1950s the notion could be taken out of the semantic context of the big Hollywood studios and their god-like Olympian stars and wander into the sleazy sphere of nude photography evidences a significant shift within the aesthetics of mass culture. Glamour had, as a British lexicographer ascertained in 1947, become a "vogue word". With the word one could be talking about a girl or a gigolo, at any rate the press had fallen upon a much more variously useable term: "Glamour has paratrooped its way over the stage gossip, film 'pars', and the rest of current journalism".³¹ Glamour, one of the key categories with which the culture industry had attempted to describe itself and its products since the 1920s,³² had obviously undergone a change in function and meaning. At least the notion did not just fit in seamlessly with the traditional semantic, it now covered a wider field of meaning, parallel and in reaction to changes in the media and consumer landscape of the war and post-war years.

Now, approaching the end of the era of the studio system, the beginning of TV, and in concert with an economically burgeoning American middle class, the era of the Gowlands and the photo-amateur and a new type of "natural" film star had arrived. For over two decades one had identified glamour with a perfect and refined staging of bodies and surfaces – a visual technology of photography and filmic images which had produced a radically artificial beauty. At that moment, Hollywood's image aesthetic was in crisis and the symptoms leading to its downfall were the big studios' cultural conception of stars, their Art Deco classicism and the baroque opulence of musicals. Rather than studio photographers like George Hurrell, Edward Steichen or Ruth Harriet Louise, *Life*-reporter and paparazzi of *Naked Hollywood* (the title of the epoch making 1953 book of photographs by Weegee) was taken on board. The pseudo aristocratic stagings of glamour had to give way to a new "more democratic" system of portrayal.³³ Glamour would now be offered at various prices, even at a discount. It entered into genre hierarchies in the cinema at B and C levels becoming more than ever before an advertising pitch for cosmetics and other mass products. In Miami the architect Morris Lapidus built hotels such as the Fontainebleau (1954) – an ensemble of indulgent curving stages for the self-presentation and consumer interests of a new middle class. The architecture was specifically conceived as a film set and attracted the generation that had survived and withstood the Great Depression and World War II offering the opportunity to stage themselves in a novel, close relationship to glamour. For glamour was no longer rooted in the exclusive sphere of remote stars but instead was becoming increasingly accessible to a new moneyed class.

In this time of crisis, glamour became the object and focus of the newly emergent phenomenon of camp. The devaluation of glamour launched a now morbid, now melancholy, now frenetic reevaluation and recontextualisation of the glamorous. The drag scene began to develop its repertoire through an interpreted appropriation of the now apparently useless glamour archive of Hollywood. Glamour suddenly was available even for *counter-glamorous* movements.

Around the same time and with in part similar intentions to those of the camp underground, fine artists discovered glamour for themselves. British pop art examined glamour at the end of the 1950s – documented by Richard Hamilton's famous list of the ingredients of pop in 1957³⁴ – as a constituent part of "pop art", as well as of the "art" of popular culture relevant to the attempt to come to terms with the popular culture surfacing in the fine arts. In the early 1960s Andy Warhol, influenced by Jack Smith, began his decades long construction of a parallel glamour dimension, in which the icons and production sites of the popular entertainment culture were investigated, imitated and deformed. In contrast to the struggle for demarcation from modernist art, Pop Art and postmodernism entered into a phase of continual interaction in the relations between fine art, fashion, film, pop

29 Sarah Berry, *Screen Style, Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2000, p. xxi.

30 Peter Gowland, *How to Take Glamour Photos*, Greenwich, CN: Fawcett 1957, p. 5.

31 Eric Partridge, *Usage and Abuse: A Guide to Good English*, London: Hamish Hamilton 1947, p.361 (quoted in Réka C.V. Buckley/Stephen Gundle, *Flash Trash, Gianni Versace and the Theory and Practice of Glamour*, in: Stella Bruzzi/Pamela Church Gibson [ed.], *Fashion Cultures. Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, London/New York: Routledge 2000, pp. 331-332).

32 "What made Hollywood unique was its total concentration on one thing. That was the word "glamour" – a word that Hollywood will always evoke." (Diana Vreeland, *Romantic and Glamorous Hollywood Design*, New York: The Costume Institute/The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1974, unpaginated).

33 See Fahey/Rich, *Masters of Starlight*, pp. 22-24.

34 Richard Hamilton, Letter to Peter and Alison Smithson, in: *Collected Words 1953-1982*, London 1982, here quoted from: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press 1990, p. 182.

music, adverts, design and identity politics, the dawning of which can be witnessed in surrealism in the work of Man Ray, Dalí or Merit Oppenheim.

Meta glamour, counter glamour

In autumn 1975 an edition of *FILE Magazine* appeared, which the Canadian art group General Idea had been producing since 1970. The cover bore the words "Glamour Issue", and the three members of General Idea, AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal, and Felix Partz, already well rehearsed in the masking, travesty and appropriation of the representational system of mass culture, promised their readers, "the story of Glamour and the part it has played in our art".³⁵ Glamour would be defined as a radically emptied artificiality, without properties and thoroughly immobilising. Using the rhetoric of a lifestyle consultant and the pathos of an avant-gardist artist's manifesto General Idea explained that glamour had dissolved Marxism as "the single revolutionary statement of the twentieth century". Like myth, glamour reduces reality, makes it visible at a glance. The objectifying function of glamour refers immediately to the rationality of the economic: "Glamour acts economically. It erases the complexity of the human image and human acts, leaving the simplicity of essences".

General Idea's radically anti-authenticism in their usage of the notion of glamour has to be seen in the context of various processes of the artistic appropriation and political re-dedication in queer culture. In the previous decades this process permitted itself to develop an idea of counter glamour, continually forming itself anew in the examination of versions of glamour as commodity aesthetics *tout court*, thereby producing a space of oppositional, often somewhat camouflaged aesthetic and economic activity. Glamour producers in the field of art became, like Andy Warhol, *art directors* and companies of higher and lower status. In other words: if one understands, as did General Idea, the glamour category as knitting aesthetics and economics so closely, the aesthetic appropriations and rededications of glamour are also interventions at the level of the economic.

Glamorous stagings can work oppositionally, they are, with all alleged straightforwardness also always to be read dialectally. Their shimmering and shining could at the same time sharpen and prevent the view on the social relationship. Usually the desire for glamour in thought and deed avoids political categories. But as soon as its central role in the logic and aesthetic of capitalism is recognised and reflected upon, it gains political valence. Glamour is simultaneously the symbolic surface of power and wealth like the eternally unfulfilled promise of – at least symbolically – the redistribution of social prosperity.

All these opposing messages and effects are registered in the art of the present and its predecessors in the twentieth century. Occasionally the longing for (past) utopias of glamour in a present in which glamour is an omnipresent call to self-optimisation, has become the object and subject of artistic practice. Then again glamour appears as an untrickable foil to individual obsessions and dependencies. Between meta glamour and counter glamour, between the self-staging as star and the critique of glamour as fixed subjectivity, there develops in the fine arts a dealing with glamour which, for a moment, a gesture, a glimpse, lifts it from the traffic of commodities and exchange value production. In the artistic production and documents brought together for *The Future Has a Silver Lining* such ephemeral strategies abound: in the gestures of homage (Manon, Francesco Vezzoli, T.J. Wilcox), the reflections of stardom's and glamour's architecture and design (Tom Burr, Nicole Wermers, Josephine Meckseper, Julian Göthe, Bernhard Martin), in the aesthetic analysis of expenditure and states of emergency (Cerith Wyn Evans, Katharina Sieverding, Janet Cardiff/George Bures Miller, Sylvie Fleury), with the archiving of memories of glamorous moments (Marc Camille Chaimowicz, John Edward Heys, Michel Auder, T.J. Wilcox), of serial self-transformation (Urs Lüthi, Carlos Pazos, Leigh Bowery, Bride Dellsperger), the critique of the dominant images of beauty (Sanja Iveković, Kutlug Ataman, Daniele Buetti). So the glance is permitted to wander over the blueprints of the glamorous, its composition, and the labour involved in its manufacturing. For a brief moment...

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Link to the exhibition:

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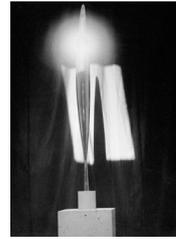
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Eve Arnold, Silvana Mangano, 1956, b/w photograph, from: *Eve Arnold: In Retrospect*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1995



Edward Steichen, the first cast of Constantin Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, approx. 1925, b/w photograph



Constantin Brancusi, *L'Oiseau dans l'espace* (also: *L'Oiseau vol*), 1927, b/w photograph



Cecil Beaton, fashion model in front of *Number 1* (1950) from Jackson Pollock, photographie for «The New Soft Look», *Vogue*, 1. March 1951



Cecil Beaton, fashion model in front of *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30* (1950) from Jackson Pollock, photographie for «The New Soft Look», *Vogue*, 1. March 1951



Edward Steichen, Marlene Dietrich, 1935, b/w photograph



Klaus Müller-Lau, Frieda Grafe and Josef von Sternberg, 1969



Norman Solomon, shooting of Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, Dia, 1962 © N. Solomon & The Plaster Foundation



Gilles Larrain, «Wally» (The Cockettes), colour photograph, from: G.L., *Idols*, New York/London: Links 1973



Morris Lapidus, The Fontainebleau Hotel (1954) and in the back Eden Roc (1955), Miami Beach (Foto courtesy of the archive of Morris Lapidus)



General Idea, *FILE Magazine: Glamour Issue*, autumn 1975

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