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Between Feminism and Femininity: Style and the City.
Reading Sarah Jessica Parker as a Fashion Icon - paper

I propose to investigate the attributes (and contradictions) of the New Global Feminine, exemplified by such stars as Sarah Jessica Parker, particularly in her role as Carrie Bradshaw in Sex and the City (HBO, USA). I argue that Sarah Jessica Parker (SJP) as an icon or a “star narrative” is produced by the inter-textual play of the television programme, Candace Bushnell’s publications, fashion magazines, gossip columns, etc. Within this inter-textual nexus, SJP serves as a vehicle for the circulation of style as a set of consumable items. This category of style contests and supports an aesthetic associated with modernism that depends upon a distinction between high art and popular culture.

The SJP “style” is high fashion and “trash”. Carrie/SJP wears Manolo Blahniks, likes artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and attends the opera. SJP as a star persona circulates largely through popular media, for example, television (Sky TV, NZ) or magazines such as Who (10 February, 2003, Time South Pacific) or Cosmopolitan (September 2003, Hearst/ ACP Australia). While representing global norms, SJP is also referenced as a means of re-affirming local affiliation. NZ Style (September 2003) in a cover story invites readers to: “Meet the Wellington Designer who dresses J.LO and Sarah Jessica Parker”.

An international L’Oréal hair colour campaign coined the phrase: “I’m worth it.” This notion of self-worth characterizes the presentation and marketing of fashion in the post-1970s. “Self-worth” as a concept articulates the uneasy alliance between traditional codes of femininity and the new codes that define the economically autonomous woman as global citizen. I will argue that SJP, through the set of interlocking texts that define her star persona, exemplifies the traits and contradictions of what might be termed post-1970s “technologies of the self” (in Michel Foucault’s words) that have come to challenge the aesthetic and ethical assumptions of modernism.

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