

RADNER Hilary (NZ)

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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