

Translated excerpt

**Thomas Macho**  
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*Role models*

Translated by Zaia Alexander



135: Richard Avedon: Dorian Leigh (1950)



136: Irving Penn: Lisa Fonssagrives (1950)



137: Richard Avedon: Dovima (1955)

6.

A history of 20th century models could be charted by perusing famous photographs or top fashion magazines, but it also could be depicted through a sequence of historical stages, which is the path New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art took for its exhibition *The Model as Muse - Embodying Fashion* in (May 6 - 9 August 2009). After an introductory segment covering models of the interwar period, it focused on the *Golden Age of Haute Couture*.<sup>34</sup> Some buzz words associated with the previously mentioned models, Lisa Fonssagrives, Sunny Harnett, and Dorian Leigh might be: glitz, glamour, style, elegance, aristocratic. Cecil Beaton's photograph, which was published in the June 1948 issue of *Vogue*, is emblematic:

Dorian Leigh - fourth from the left – is surrounded by unknown models dressed as ladies-in-waiting. Another image, perhaps less obvious, is Irving Penn's arrangement of the *Twelve Most Photographed Models* which was published May 1947 in *Vogue*: In this picture elegance (embodied by Lisa Fonssagrives sixth and Lily Carlson seventh from left) stands in contrast to a model wearing a simple, almost folksy dress (Dana Jenney fourth from left). Most models of the 1940s and 1950s - especially from today's perspective – have striking, unique, and not extremely youthful faces. For the most part we see women, rarely girls; they possess a stark, powerful, personal physiognomy; rarely with childishly naive features. In 1977, after writing her bestselling *Book of Model Beauty* (1968), the head of Eileen Ford agency published a guide for *Beauty Now and Forever*, with the promising subtitle *Secrets of Beauty after 35* (Simon & Schuster). In this book—aside from recommendations about diet, hair care and makeup, healthy sex, sports and positive thinking – she includes a final chapter entitled, *Former Models Speak-up Today*, in which prominent models of past decades answer a stereotypical questionnaire. They are asked their age, how many children and grandchildren they have, their weight, if their body measurements have changed (compared to earlier times), what cosmetics they recommend. Two questions deal with the women's strategies for "staying happy and interested in the world" and their views on plastic surgery, which few of them approved of. It is not so much the answers that surprise us, often they are humorous and even at times monosyllabic; rather it's the fact that the women answered them at all: obviously our view today of what is taboo or embarrassing is quite different.<sup>35</sup>

According to the exhibition *The Model as Muse*<sup>36</sup>, the 60s produced a *Youthquake* that rocked the world, fashion, and models, and this trend towards youth and childhood also intensified the fascination for androgyny, which the *It Girls* of the



138: Cecil Beaton (1948)



139: Irving Penn (1947)

1920s exemplified with their famously bobbed hair. In some sense - after Jean Shrimpton - a single face shaped the era and epitomized it visually: the face of a girl from Neasden, a suburb of London. This girl, who was crowned the first 'supermodel' in fashion history, was called Lesley Hornby; yet the world knew her by the nickname *Twiggy*. "Twiggy emerged as the face of a generational shift. In some ways, her schoolboy haircut, Cupid's bow mouth, and huge eyes recalled caricatures of the 1920s flapper. [...] Although she was first embraced by publications of junior and high street fashion, Twiggy was soon being featured on the covers of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* and even invited to model, as described in *Life* magazine's hagiographic profile of the "Face of 1967" in Paris couture collections. Despite a personality of sweetness spiked with Cockney charm, Twiggy was typically photographed unsmiling with a blankness of expression. The childish proportions of her face combined with her signature exaggerated and painstakingly painted lashes, or "Twiggies," resulted in a distinctive doll-like Pierrot effect, alternately wistful and petulant. Her ostensible naiveté was mediated by a chin-tucked-under wariness."<sup>37</sup> Along with Twiggy's outward appearance came the question: what are the rules for playing with one's identity? This query was formulated in the many photographs taken by Melvin Sokolsky: one, for example, shows Twiggy standing in front of a display window surrounded by



140: Melvin Sokolsky: Twiggy (1967)



141: Melvin Sokolsky: Twiggy Bar New York (1967)



142: William Klein: *Qui êtes-vous, Polly Maggoo?* (1966)

people holding up black and white paper masks of Twiggy to their faces, she is holding a stuffed owl doll in her right arm- a childish symbol of Athena- bearing labels from the company Steiff and another Twiggy mask. Bert Stern photographed Twiggy sitting atop a television set with a Twiggy portrait on screen for the March 1967 issue of *Vogue* and William Klein, painter and former *Vogue* fashion photographer, elaborated on the Twiggy-fascination of the 1960s in his satirical feature film, *Qui êtes-vous, Polly Maggoo?* (1966). The film's protagonist, played by Dorothy McGowan, responds to the question in the title with a further question: "Who am I? I'm Polly. Polly Maggoo. But between you and me, I'm not sure what I should answer. You ask me who I am. Sometimes I ask myself that same question. I get photographed. Every day I get photographed. I have been photographed thousands of times. And every time I get photographed, a little less is left of me. What will be left of me in the end? I ask you."<sup>38</sup>

After the *Youth Quake* of the late 70s and 80s came the era of body work; *Body Politics*<sup>39</sup> continues to this day. Our bodies are no longer the means of production; rather they are the aim and object of production. Today, "instead of our body

making things, we make our bodies," claims the British psychotherapist Susie Orbach.

"In the West, robotics, mechanized farm equipment, pre-prepared goods, motorized transport, high-tech warfare and so on have replaced the need for heavy physical labor. We rarely repair things because mass production makes it cheaper to replace them. Where once the body of the manual worker could be easily identified through brawn and muscle, today, across all levels of society, poorly paid jobs in the service industry and jobs at the computer leave no physical traces behind. In fact, many of us have to make a concerted effort to move at all, whether at work or in our daily life. In the past it was a privilege of the upper classes, who did not work for a living, to adorn and make themselves beautiful to pass the time and display their social status. Today, as part of a modernization and democratization of fashion, we are all encouraged to continue this tradition. We are, therefore, observing a new trend. The body itself has turned into a form of labor. It has transformed from being the means of production to the production itself."<sup>40</sup> Models are especially affected by this development. As supermodels<sup>41</sup> the body necessarily turns into a trademark beyond age, gender or national origin. Body branding produces visible brand marks: as though they, and we - like cattle, like former slaves - no longer belong to ourselves but to some sort of community, often made visible with help from piercings, tattoos, and knife cuts - from compulsive "cutting" to the scalpel used for aesthetic surgery. Bodies make work. Because they have to be fashioned ever more radically, conforming to increasingly impossible demands. A model like Claudia Schiffer, who is 1.81 meters tall, measures 88-62-91 (bust-waist-hips in centimeters), Kate Moss- 1.75 meters 84-58-89; Agyness Deyn- 1.75 meters 78-60-88; and Giselle Bündchen- 1.80 meters 86-61-82. Cindy Crawford, who is 1.77 meters tall and measures 86-66-89, is referred to in the media as being curvaceous

with a waist that would correspond to a grown woman's size 34. Defying reality, professional models have a waist the size of a four-and-a-half year old child, the hips of a thirteen-year-old girl, and a man's height."<sup>42</sup> Bodies are no longer producers but products, projects, models and images. What happens when the project, the image undermines the body, when the model takes the over the person? "Beauty is never really sad. It just hurts."<sup>43</sup> It hurts the moment the pose is struck, something the top model Dorian Leigh knew all too well: "When Dorian posed, it was like an electric shock. She placed both her feet in position, then she arranged the knees, then the hips, the waist, the arms and hands, and in the final second, she made her face take on a certain expression. If a photographer didn't wait for her, she'd give him a dirty look."<sup>44</sup> Cindy Crawford aptly called the strange image she made herself transform into, the *Thing*. "Ever since she started working as a model, she was able to put on this tough façade, which she called the *Thing*. 'Are you going to bring the *'Thing'* tonight?' Gere would sometimes ask her before they went out. Then she'd mess up her hair, strike a pose, and suddenly the *Thing* was in the room. 'Then I'd transform myself into this other character and suddenly—I don't know why—suddenly I'm reckless, tell jokes, act dramatic...And then I'd wash it off.' Cindy Crawford laughs, and the *Thing* seems to crawl away."<sup>45</sup>

7

Yet the *Thing* has taken over: The virgin has transformed into a *miss*, the *miss* into a model, the model into a *Thing*, products and people blending beyond recognition. The ultimate triumph is a mannequin, not made of wood, but of electrical currents and digital pulses. We no longer live in a patriarchy nor, of course, in a matriarchy,



143: Valérie Belin: *Sans Titre*  
(2006)

nor a filiarly, nor do we live in a society that celebrates its ancestors and children. We live in a culture of models, wherein the *Jeune Fille*, the "Young- Girl," controls and creates a format for all relationships, for all economic and libidinal systems. Following the situationist critique of the spectacle, the French author's collective *Tiqqun* wrote a polemic against the collective submission to this system. "The essence of the Young-Girl is to reduce the metaphysical fact of finiteness to a simple *technical* question: What anti-wrinkle cream works the best? The most horrifying feature of the Young-Girl, without a doubt, is the manic effort not to mar her appearance either by time or space, by the environment or by history, always and everywhere she must look flawless."<sup>46</sup> This longed-for perfection manifests itself in the suffering caused by anorexia, which, according to the *Tiqqun* manifestos, should not be understood as a peripheral symptom easily healed





144: Valérie Belin: *Sans Titre*  
(2006)

through a poster campaign by Oliviero Toscani, or by the Ford Agency's "ban" on anorexia, rather it lies at the very core of the Young-Girl faith.<sup>47</sup> The Young-Girl dreams of a body purely transparent in the lights of the Spectacle. [...] What the Young-Girl proves is that there's no pretty surface without a terrible depth behind it. [...] Anorexia must be seen as more than a fashionable pathology: the desire to liberate oneself from a body entirely colonized by commodity symbology, to reduce to dust a physical objectivity of which the Young-Girl has been wholly dispossessed. The Young-Girl is afflicted with what might be called an "angel complex": she aims for a perfection that would consist in being *disembodied*."<sup>48</sup> As symptomatic, the "Young-Girl is neither necessarily female nor necessarily young, that's what the audience learns, for example, from a carefully staged announcement by an old man named Karl Lagerfeld: "I have a special machine that



145: Prinzessin Diana  
(1961 – 1997)



146: Jackie Kennedy  
(1929 – 1994)

uses carefully calibrated vibrations to develop muscle mass back to its original form. If you played sports before you were 20, you won't have any problem getting back into your original shape. Beneath the fat you've accumulated over the years, you still have the original muscle structure. Everything was still there for me as it was when I was young. Beneath it all, I'm rock-hard. I'm like that table. That's the great thing about the story. I'm like the stone-aged man they found buried in ice. [...] I'm an auto-fascist, a dictator who puts myself under pressure. When it comes to me, I don't tolerate democracy. There is no discussion, I give orders."<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, not only the *Jeune-Fille*, the Pandora-like girls, but the economy and politics have successfully been colonized. When Barack Obama was voted U.S. president, the tabloids were primarily concerned about what his wife Michelle, the new mistress of the White House, was wearing. First Ladies are the models of politics: The *Queens of Hearts* who are constantly at risk of either being reduced to a playing card (Queen of Hearts) or a paper mask. When on 31 August 1997 Lady Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, died in a car accident - running away from photographers –the complex relationships between the model, the Queen of



147: Jacqueline Onassis

Hearts, and the pristine body image of the Jeune Fille was briefly brought to light. Since that day, it is evident that the strategies of immortalizing are inclined to focus on the killing; paper faces don't need a body anymore. That the continuous staging of media doubles to eliminate the disturbing remains of the original would be seductive was, of course, clear before the car chase in Paris: most attacks are committed by fans of celebrities. The star literally has to rise to the stars, the ageless image must - as opposed to the ideal of Dorian Gray-replace the aging body. I'm not sure what the many millions of television viewers saw at Diana's funeral and mourned over: a ritual sacrifice? The successful early death of a "virtual character" (as Paul Virilio believed<sup>50</sup>)? Or one's own failed—not convertible to the immortality of celebrities— death in the future? Maybe they had perceived the strange recursions that accompanied the tragic event. The media especially reported about the medial synchronization of the inconceivably gigantic mass of mourners; they also commented on the question of their own complicity, as if the paparazzi should be fixated in photographs. After the princess's unexpected death, the public was inundated with large-format portraits; almost every magazine published some special edition with countless photos of Diana. Sometimes it seemed as if the images merged into a single image that in the end was regarded as

the definitive portrait. One of the most impressive - and strange - pictures of Diana graced the mass-selling recordings of the funeral ceremonies. In this picture, we see a woman dressed in black and looking off to the side. The expression on her face seems troubled, the picture clearly shows a grieving woman, a kind of *Pietà*, who must bear the sacrificial death of her child.<sup>51</sup> But this child is herself. If you were to show this picture to a person who didn't know her, they would think the woman was a widow, possibly a female allegory of the mourners, and perhaps the picture was taken at the funeral service for Gianni Versace, who on the 15 July 1997, just weeks prior to Diana's accident, was shot in Miami. Seven weeks later, the media model, the double, the 'Thing', takes part in her own funeral. In a commentary, Christian Geyer noted: "It was neither a matter of life nor death, it was about pictures."<sup>52</sup> One might translate this idea into a question: What is it actually about, when it comes to pictures?

Diana was not the first model of political representation. But we can perceive through her fate the contours of the *Jeune Fille* – the symptomatic appearance of a fashion-conscious, omniscient, all-encompassing media Holy Virgin, *Queen of Hearts* and flawless mistress – quintessentially (and perhaps a bit more self-critical) than Jacqueline Lee Bouvier, wife of John F. Kennedy, whose marriage to Aristotle Onassis had been more brazenly disparaged than Diana's love-affair with Dodi Al-Fayed. Jackie was Diana's direct precursor, the *First Lady* par excellence: after Eleanor Roosevelt and Mamie Eisenhower, before Pat Nixon, Betty Ford, Nancy Reagan and Hillary Clinton.<sup>53</sup> In an inspiring study of *Jackie Under My Skin* (1995), Wayne Koestenbaum accurately reconstructs the media construction of Jackie O.: "In my favorite photo of Jackie Kennedy, she is walking away from a black car. She wears dark glasses, white gloves, a white scarf tied under her chin.

Her face is expressionless. Is she guilty or innocent? Is she approaching a church or a courtroom? JFK stands a few feet behind her - clearly she is the First Lady, an official person. Her lanky, athletic arm describes a pure line (a balletomanes delight). The dress is so severe, its cut so absolute, so devoid of ornament, that she also resembles Audrey Hepburn prepping for *The Nun's Story* - Jackie looks like a asanctified woman, but also like a woman in a hurry—a woman with nasty (Mafia?) business to transact? Is she a gun moll? Is she the Pope's confidante? Crowds gather in the distance behind her, but they seem scenery - background peasants in a Renaissance religious painting. Or is Jackie the fake? What attracts me to this image is Jackie's seriousness: spy in a dangerous mission, she's intent to escape, to reveal nothing. She must preserve the Iron Curtain with her own well-ironed dress and well-ironed manners; she must not give away the code. She's caught in the midst of flying away from inspection. She can't be held accountable to one identity - see, she's walking briskly toward another identity much faster than JFK, who must always remain JFK. That's why he seems to move more slowly, always struggling against back pain and the leadenness of a steady self."<sup>54</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>34</sup>The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion. Ed. Harold Koda and Kohle Yohannan (New Haven/London/New York: Yale UP/ Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009) 26-63.

<sup>35</sup>Eileen Ford, Beauty Now and Forever. Secrets of Beauty after 35 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977) 185 – 242.

<sup>36</sup>The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion, loc. cit., 64 – 97.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. 73.

<sup>38</sup>William Klein, Qui êtes-vous, Polly Maggoo? (France, 1966). Quoted in: Michael Gross, Model, loc. cit., 43.

<sup>39</sup>The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion, loc. cit. 98 – 131.

<sup>40</sup>Susie Orbach, Bodies: Schlachtfelder der Schönheit. Trans. Cornelia Holfelder-von der Tann, (Zurich / Hamburg: Arche, 2010) 13.

<sup>41</sup>The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion, loc cit.132 – 197.

<sup>42</sup>Waltraud Posch, Projekt Körper: Wie der Kult um die Schönheit unser Leben prägt (Frankfurt a. M./ New York: Campus, 2009) 89.

<sup>43</sup>Michel Schneider, Marilyns letzte Sitzung, Trans. Barbara Schaden (Munich: btb, 2007) 352.

<sup>44</sup>Michael Gross, Model, loc cit., 103

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. 41

<sup>46</sup>Tiqqun, „Grundbausteine einer Theorie des Jungen-Mädchens.“ Translated from the philological arm of the German section of the PI (Parti Imaginaire) (Berlin: Merve, 2009) 48.

<sup>47</sup> Crystal Renn with Marjorie Ingall, Hungry: Ich wollte essen. Aber ich wollte auch in der Vogue sein. Trans. Ingrid Exo (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Tiqqun, „Grundbausteine einer Theorie des Jungen-Mädchens, loc. cit. 120 – 123.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Sahner, Karl (Munich: Verlag mvg, 2009) 314.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Virilio, “Der Paparazzo, das sind wir, “Der Spiegel, nr. 37, 8. September 1997. (Hamburg. 1997) 220.

<sup>51</sup> "Moderne Maria," caption Der Spiegel, nr. 37, 8 September 1997. (Hamburg, 1997) 223. See also the comparison of a photo of Diana in 1995 with a picture of a Madonna from 1400 in Der Spiegel, nr. 39, 22 September 1997 (Hamburg, 1997) 245

<sup>52</sup> Christian Geyer, “Leben im Aufschub“, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, No. 203, 2 September 1997 (Frankfurt a.M., 1997) 41.

<sup>53</sup> Dorothy Schneider / Carl J. Schneier (eds): First Ladies. A Biographical Dictionary (New York: Facts on File, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Wayne Koestenbaum, Jackie O. Der Fan und sein Star, Trans. Joachim Kalka (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997) 33.

## **Photo Captions**

135: Richard Avedon: Dorian Leigh (1950)

136: Irving Penn: Lisa Fonssagrives (1950)

137: Richard Avedon: Dovima (1955)

138: Cecil Beaton (1948)

139: Irving Penn (1947)

140: Melvin Sokolsky: Twiggy (1967)

141: Melvin Sokolsky: Twiggy Bar

New York (1967)

142: William Klein: Qui êtes-vous, Polly Maggoo? (1966)

143: Valérie Belin: Sans Titre (2006)

144: Valérie Benli: Sans Titre (2006)

145: Princess Diana (1961-1997)

146: Jackie Kennedy (1929 - 1994)

147: Jacqueline Onassis