

**“A Value System Ruled By Beauty”**

1 - Make a summary of the following article in 150 words (+/- 10%). (8 points)

2 - Using arguments and examples from the text, but also your own ideas, discuss the meaning, but also the potential consequences, of Ms Swank's remark : “I think your image is part of your career because the career itself is commerce” (minimum half a page). (8 points)

3 - Explain the following words **in English**. (4 points)

- mini-mogul
- WASP
- ubiquitous
- feat
- millinery
- the runway
- throwback
- prevalence

**Durée de l'épreuve : 1h30**



# A Value System Ruled by Beauty

By GUY TREBAY

Spend a week looking into the glass of fashion and you soon realize that the individual actually is the universal. **Almost nobody** not the rich, not the celebrated, not the occupationally beautiful has any true sense of how they are perceived.

Essay

Models do not think they are too skinny. Actors do not find themselves handsome. Stars claim not to know what all the fuss is about. Our crazy cultural obsession with the perfected surface has become so absolute that everybody ends up having to work off some obscure psychic debt.

"I should have had a face a lot different than mine," Vincent Gallo, the actor and director and real estate mogul explained before the Anna Sui show on September 13 in Manhattan.

It would surprise some people to learn that Mr. Gallo had blond curls and a button nose as a boy. Then, one day he experienced his first "sex thoughts" and his nose grew large and his hair turned dark. And now he is a director famous for having persuaded Chloé Sevigny to be filmed performing on him an act whose name one is discouraged from printing here.

"People think I look scary and mean, and maybe I am scary and mean," Mr. Gallo said. "But I always wished I had classic nerdy WASP looks." He always wished, Mr. Gallo added, improbably, that he looked like George Will, the conservative commentator.

And Mischa Barton always wanted to be Meryl Streep. And that, one presumes, is why she seemed to be everywhere, always, throughout Fashion Week, as ubiquitous and ethereally beautiful as the Holy Ghost, although easier to capture on film.

This behavior is far from rare during the fashion cycles. Isabella Blow, the outlandish fashion editor of Tatler, has sometimes switched costumes seven times in a day, a feat when you consider her taste for complicated millinery: hats in the shape of lips or flying saucers or festooned with dead birds. And a prominent Italian fash-

ion editor is known, during the European collections, to hire a van that she fills with clothes racks, in order never to be photographed in the same outfit twice.

"What's she pushing?" one editor asked of the ever-present Ms. Barton. But, honestly, what kind of question is that? What is anyone pushing anymore? When did Carmen Electra (née Tara Patrick) start occupying the front-row seats once reserved for people who had highly developed ideas about kick pleats and the cut of a sleeve?

"At one time I wasn't into it," Ms. Electra explained before the Diane Von Furstenberg show earlier in the week. "I was about sexiness." By now any self-respecting Pussycat Doll knows what happens to those who fail to keep up with fashion. They turn up as pictorial one-liners in the tabloids.

"You have to be into fashion," said Ms. Electra, echoing a particularly Warholian remark Hilary Swank made after she had spent a day hawking Guerlain's new Insolence perfume (she sold \$50,000 worth; shopgirls take note) at Saks Fifth Avenue.

"I think your image is part of your career because the career itself is commerce," Ms. Swank told Women's Wear Daily. Being good in business, as Warhol noted in "The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)," newly republished by Harcourt, is "the most fascinating kind of art."

And what about the woman in the front row of the Bill Blass show on September 12, the performer best known for a wardrobe malfunction and Nipplegate?

"Why am I here? Why not?" said Janet Jackson, in a breathy whisper that sounds somehow less cutely affected now that she is 40. The answer is fairly straightforward. Ms. Jackson has a new album to promote. Its title is "20 Y.O.,"

for 20 years old. Who says psychological malady does not run deep in families?

If Ms. Jackson were really in on the secrets of fashion she would surely appreciate some of the more perverse paradoxes of the trade. Beauty, sexiness and class, if not exactly beside the point, are concepts that the industry has distorted almost to the breaking point. I cannot be alone in thinking it significant that models have somehow stopped being beautiful.

This is not to suggest that there are no longer gorgeous women on the runway. There was, most conspicuously, the luscious Hilary Rhoda, with her long legs and patrician profile a throwback to the classic lovelies of an earlier age.

There was also Cecilia Mendez, an obscure 18-year-old from Argentina, who was the season's most desirable runway gamine. There was Freja Beha, a punky Danish teenager with long legs, intelligent eyes and a profile that, far from being classical, suggests a creation from Geppetto's bench.

But there was also an alarming number of women as expressionless as cyborgs, their prevalence, as some in the industry complained,

a matter of editorial whim and not accident. "They're these faceless, sexless things," said James Scully, one of the industry's most sought-after casting directors. "The editors say 'I don't care about personality. I want blanks.'"

It is those same young sad sacks that inspired Madrid to ban super-thin models from working during that city's Fashion Week.

"It's a problem for some of us in the business," Mr. Scully said. But the problem does not necessarily end there. Fashion, after all, is in the business of pushing images. "I can't imagine any woman looking at these girls and saying, 'I want to look like that,'" said the casting director.

I can.



Jeff Christensen/Associated Press

Mischa Barton, an actress, was ubiquitous during Fashion Week.

The New York Times

Sat., September 23, 2006