

Weekly Readings for Celebrity Culture

GLAMOUR LABOR

Elizabeth Wissinger, “Glamour Labour in the Age of Kardashian”

by NORA COMTOIS

Stéphanie Genz, “My Job is Me: Postfeminist Celebrity Culture and the Gendering of Authenticity”

by SABINA GAUDIANO

Kirsty Fairclough, “Nothing Less than Perfect: Female Celebrity, Ageing, and Hyper-Scrutiny in the Gossip Industry”

by DYLAN BLACKMAN

Elizabeth Wissinger, “Glamour Labour in the Age of Kardashian”

- Wissinger analyzes glamour labour through the Kardashians, especially Kim
- **glamour labour** = the constant work to edit the body to fit the curated image presented online
- digital media, or **imaging regimes**, track every click/like → bodies gain value through visibility and attention

Part 1: Fashions in Bodies

- bodies go in and out of style just like fashion
- **PAST** — body ideals signaled class
- ex. 1900s: lean = **elite** / hourglass = **working class** (associated with prostitution & pornography)
- **PRESENT** — high/low body distinctions are blurred
- **“post-fashion” era** = where “the body is the new outfit” & “the gym is the new atelier”; the clothes matter less than the bodies in them



Figures 1 and 2: Examples of the two types of bodies (left: flapper fashion, right: Theda Bara as Cleopatra).

- celebrities are wearing their bodies as forms of couture
- ex. 2015 Met Gala — Kim, Beyoncé, & J-Lo wear sheer dresses, putting their bodies on display as much as their look
- fashion shaping bodies (corsets, Spanx) → bodies modified to fit fashion (gym, surgery)
- **CULTURAL MESSAGE** — anyone can have the ideal body if they work hard enough (which ignores money, access, privilege)
- **NEW BEAUTY RULE** — instead of effortlessness, bodies should look like the result of work



Part 2: You Better Work

- Kim's job = look like a Photoshopped body in real life
- promotes the **"all-American work ethic"**
- Kim represents the "everywoman" — short, curvy (not a typical supermodel figure) → "relatable"
- she embodies **speculative labour** = constant self-branding for potential future gain
- builds on the concept of **wages of glamour** = crafting femininity as economic value

Part 3: Social Media Stars ... of the 1800s

- self-branding + body display for economic gain existed long before Instagram
 - ex. 1800s: **carte de visite** (photographic calling cards) = early form of image-based fame
 - sparked “cartomania” where people collected portraits of attractive strangers
 - made image commercially valuable → birth of fashion modeling
 - Instagram is the modern version — ordinary people use images for status + visibility
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- the rise of a new kind of work — **fame**
 - reflects **gig economy** = temporary "gigs" instead of traditional, long-term employment
 - pleasure + exploitation intertwined → glamour labour feels empowering yet draining



1) Bodily ideals have shifted for over a century. Today, with accessible cosmetic procedures, how will people keep up with changing trends once their bodies are permanently altered? Could this fuel an endless cycle of modification?

2) If “imaging regimes” shape how bodies engage with media, how does “glamour labor” change when anyone can download an app to access tools like Photoshop & AI to enhance their image?