‘Fashion Models as Cultural Intermediaries: The Mobilisation of Affect’

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For Mam and Dad...
Abstract

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This research thesis consists of a theoretical and empirical exploration of cultural mediation. It articulates current conceptualisations while also questioning the mystified nature with which cultural intermediaries are dealt in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Adopting a non-representational approach, this research augments current representational descriptions by analysing what cultural intermediaries of high fashion do when they frame aesthetic consumption experiences as legitimate and desirable.

Despite their significant influence on consumption, current theorisations in CCT have been limited to describing cultural intermediaries as ‘sorcerers’, who possess a magical capacity to bewitch consumers and leave them spellbound. A non-representational mode of theorising does not explicitly focus on the meaning embodied by these agents, but rather deconstructs this ‘magical’ veil by following the embodied processes that mobilise affect.

I conceptualise affect as a trigger for bodies’ imaginative consumption and a core influence on bodies’ inevitable interpretation of meaning. It is an ineffable, embodied and contagious life energy that invokes a change to bodies’ dispositions and perceptions of reality. In a late capitalist, affective economy, value derives from cultural intermediaries’ expert capacity to frame the consumption experience for bodies in relation by forging an emotional tie. This thesis adopts narrative inquiry and personal introspection to trace intermediaries’ embodied processes that mobilise affect and to contextualise the impact felt upon being affected.

I conclude that cultural intermediaries mobilise affect by acting as conduits for the flow of contagious energies that pervade the atmosphere. In doing so, they evoke an affecting presence that works with imagining technologies to impact bodies in relation through the effortless modulation of affective flow. The result of such enchanting bodies’ and frames the aesthetic consumption experience as one that has become elevated to an authentic, transcendent reality.
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I recall the stories recounted by my father, when I was a child, of his experience of living in Paris in the late 1960s. ‘I didn’t drink or smoke’ he would proclaim, ‘but I had eleven different suits and a different pair of shoes for every day of the week’. I’ve not quite decided whether this was intended to be boastful or whether he meant it as a warning to his teenage son against potential vices. For him there were clearly better things to spend your money on. Either way, there was always an importance placed on appearance in my home. I remember returning home as a teenager having bought new clothes and being goaded into holding an impromptu ‘fashion show’. During such events I would have to try on my new acquisitions and confess to the money I had spent. Unlike most interactions of a similar nature between father and son, I was never chastised for spending too much money. Instead, there were scolding’s that resulted from buying ‘tat’, as my father described it. I remember how he once brought me to a tailor on my 18th birthday to be fitted for a suit. I distinctly recall the ‘tring’ of the door as we entered the soft spongy carpet beneath my feet, and the pleasant aroma of cologne which enveloped the senses immediately upon entering. After the owner greeted my father as an old friend, I watched as he carefully touched the different sample materials that would later constitute my suit. At the same time he explained to me the type of material that he was touching. While I was being measured, he stressed not only the importance of owning a suit, but of owning one that fit correctly. With each stride up and down the carpet he tried to legitimise what we were doing with anecdotes from his younger days. Invariably these anecdotes involved a suit being used to impress a young woman. Finally, as I stood before him in my fitted suit, I remember how his face lit up with joy. Instead of the usual handshake, he gave me a hug and wished me happy birthday. Having paid for my new suit he picked up a couple for himself also. Upon returning home from the tailor, the usual argument with my mother would ensue. My father would always fail in his attempt to justify his expensive purchases. Losing the argument, he would take her hand and waltz around the kitchen singing ‘you make me feel so young’ by Frank Sinatra. As she hesitantly followed, her anger would turn to laughter as she gave in to the man’s charms. Yet on my birthday there was no argument to preface our waltz around the kitchen. My mother adored my suit and my father put on his favourite Sinatra song. For the next three minutes, we laughed and danced around the kitchen. When the song stopped, I took off the suit, put it into a black suit carrier bag and hung it in my wardrobe. It would never again fit.
That suit still hangs in the wardrobe of any room I live in. For me, it embodies so many joyous emotions from that day; the excitement of the car journey, the pride I felt looking in the mirror, and the joy of dancing around the kitchen. For my father, if you looked good, you felt good, and you couldn’t put a price on feeling good. It was as though these suits allowed him to project the inner character concealed by his casual clothes. As far as my father was concerned, clothes really did ‘make the man’. His emphasis on luxury style and grooming might seem somewhat contradictive to our means. We were a suburban middle class family. He was a factory worker and my mother a clerical officer with the Health Board. He would later tell me that this preoccupation with high fashion style stemmed from his experience of Paris. Although nostalgic, Paris retained its captivating aura for my father. His favourite actors, films and authors were such because they all embodied this ineffable aura of style, elegance and youth that he associated with Paris. I eventually arranged a trip where he and I would travel to Paris. He was very grateful but he didn’t come. He told me that to go back there now after four decades would ruin the magic with which the city was adorned in his imagination. He implored me to experience it on my own as he had. So I did.

My father had constructed a narrative of Paris wherein it was always springtime, a city in which the sun caressed his skin as he made his way down the narrow cobbled street where outside a quaint and secluded cafe sat Ilsa Lund awaiting his arrival. This was his reality. On a cold November night, however, mine was somewhat different. The old Parisian street lamps did little to penetrate the coffin of fog which wrapped around me. With back hunched and hands dug firmly in my pockets, I led with my left shoulder in what seemed a futile attempt to brace against the chilling vapours. Every so often, the eyes on my reddened face would open beyond a squint and I would cast a grimaced glance toward the overcast sky as I tentatively shuffled down Rue de Monceau. It seemed difficult to imagine this as the city where my father had spent ‘the best years of [his] youth’. I had never physically been to Paris yet decade’s worth of imported cultural narrative in the form of literature, art and film made me feel as though I had walked these streets before. After several uneducated turns, the cobbled stone began to give way to paving. The air, which had fallen silent for a time, was now populated by the feint murmurs of shoppers, Christmas jingles and the frenzied yelps of excited children. The sensuous aroma of confectionaries froze before it could reach my nostrils. Any yuletide cheer was banished by the stinging cold which now penetrated the threads on my grey, three quarter length wool overcoat. The tables and chairs which once adorned the streets were now bungled inside as customers scurried for some source of heat. The romantic imagery of scribbled notebooks, charcoal artists
and street performers evaporated, replaced by a commercial district instilled with a romance not worth documenting.

As I continued along the street, I raised my head every so often in the faint hope I might happen upon a store where I could buy a wool hat. Suddenly, there was a perceptible change. The blanket of thick fog surrendered to the piercing commercialist lights of the *Galeries Lafayette* which offered hope for a price. It was one of Paris’ largest and most upmarket department stores which in the previous year recorded earnings of over one billion euro. The gargantuan store stood proudly in the exclusive high fashion district of *Boulevard Haussmann*. As I ventured toward the main entrance, the sides of the building depicted an array of immaculately crafted window displays showcasing the latest fashion trends. I noticed a large gathering of some seventy people who were all cramming to gaze at one particular display. Indeed, their urgency was such that there were two suited security guards at either side ensuring a certain distance was being kept. Amid the enchanted crowd were also passers-by whose prolonged stare at the window caused them to bump into other pedestrians on the street. Interested, I jockeyed for position while simultaneously trying to avoid the outstretched arms of those recording on their phones. An older lady in front of me gave a large gasp and scurried away in disgust, as I opportunistically filled the gap, my eyes fixed on what appeared to be a private bedroom. Inside was a woman whose defined cheekbones guided my gaze down her smooth tanned skin to her pink lips which she bit seductively. With both hands on the single knot of her pink satin robe, her blue eyes gazed longingly across the room.

I followed her line of sight to the source of her pleasure. Amid gasps from several ladies in the crowd, I realised that I too was leering at the tanned back of a male model that entered the frame. He stood six feet tall and muscular, not bulky but toned. His arms, shoulders and chest were sculpted perfectly to fit under the medium sized white V-neck t-shirt which enveloped them. As the ‘show’ evolved, we, the voyeuristic audience, waited with baited breath. Clad in tight fitting black briefs, the man slowly began to prowl across the rosewood floorboards toward his beautiful prey. He moved in slow motion pausing briefly to prolong anticipation and also to tense his muscle fibres further. While still about ten feet away, he began to peel his t-shirt off over the thick ruffled head of brunette locks. When eventually within touching distance, the woman let her arms hang by her side, all the while staring into the piercing eyes of her ‘lover’. He placed his hands on her robe and undid the knot. Before the robe could fall to the ground, he authoritatively pulled at both ends of the satin tie, drawing her close him. She placed her hands on his broad chest and seemed to succumb to his charms. The man then raised his arms
offering the crowd a glimpse of his toned midriff before pushing the satin robe from the cliffs of her slight shoulders where it joined other expensive garments on the floor.

As he wrapped the woman in a way that showcased the curvature of his muscular arms, he placed her onto the bed. She lay back in a way that accentuated her feminine frame but also her snow white Chanel lace lingerie. As he circled the bed and stopped to longingly stare at his ‘lover’, I became enraptured by the various sensual pleasures made available for my attentive consumption. I felt as though I had entered into a couple’s ‘private bedroom’, a room whose atmosphere was enhanced by the dulcet tones of Chopin. Moreover, the fragrance from the Chanel atomiser that rested on the bedside antique dresser seemed to fill my nostrils. I could imagine running my hand over the surface of the rosewood drawers kept ajar by various items of feminine clothing that hung there. On the other side, an old burgundy leather armchair had draped over it a man’s black tie and crisp white shirt along with a grey, knee length cashmere overcoat. I was completely mesmerised by the aura produced by the scene- sophistication, wealth, and an overall lifestyle which epitomised affluence. As he slowly began to kiss his lover’s neck, she slid her hands down his side and clasped at his briefs, guiding my gaze toward the Dior branding.

Both protagonists began to writhe around on the luxury white silk sheets which served to emphasise their bronzed complexions. They seemed oblivious of the captive audience watching. As the woman assumed the dominant position, she began to caress and kiss his muscular body paying particular attention to his stomach, chest and arms. After some moments, the man, as if awaking from his orgasmic trance, again wrapped his arm around her back this time to undo her bra clip with ease. A short gasp from the baying crowd followed as the pair continued to seductively touch all the while making their way further under the sheets. After a short hidden grapple, the pair finally emerged with the woman yet again on top. Her bare back to the audience, she victoriously paraded a pair of black Dior briefs in her hand before throwing them to the floor. As she leant over the man, she began to kiss him before reaching for the bedside light switch, flicked it and with that, plunged the entire room into darkness.

Reflecting on that moment, I finally began to grasp that which my father found so attractive about the potentialities offered by high fashion. I had no concept of how the bitter winds perished. During that moment, imagination placed me on the other side of the window. That was my bedroom, my body, my lover, my clothes, and my life. Indeed a wool hat could never provide the degree of warmth offered by the melody, fragrances, luxury clothing and
sophisticated surroundings. The vivid sensual machinations encapsulated within that ‘moment’ interpolated a feeling that defied all logic or rationality. As I shuffled out from the crowd, I noticed the tumultuous sea of shoppers barrelling into the store. Their hurried yelps and indecipherable chatter threatened to ruin Chopin’s melody which lingered in my head and hence shut the door to vicarious abandon which remained open in my subconscious. As I gazed at a slew of Parisian balconies on a nearby street, I began to imagine the similar scenes of elegance, sophistication, wealth and passion taking place inside. As I made my way down the cobbled street I slipped back into the warmth of vicarious fantasy that was the high fashion boudoir and made my way back to the hotel.

I came to appreciate the influence that fashion can have in terms of the range of emotions that it can provoke i.e. joy, anger, love, pride, desire etc. From my early experiences I understood fashion as a vehicle which allowed for the expression of a particular persona. For instance, when my father wore a suit his whole disposition changed; his mood, appearance, bodily comportment all altered to produce a persona whose presence could be felt in a room. So from this perspective I harbour great respect for fashion as something that connotes much more than ‘selling clothes’. I have for many years appreciated its emotional impact both on the wearer but also on those with whom he interacts. My trip to Paris was also a pivotal influence on how the data within this research thesis is represented. For instance the experience of standing in the freezing cold staring at this shop window afforded me a deeper empathy with fashion models. By this I refer to my greater appreciation for the embodied performance of the fashion model in producing a connection between the consumer, brand and an overall lifestyle.

For example, while the aesthetic of the window display was arguably heavily orchestrated by third parties, the brands, pieces of furniture etc. all appeared to converge and become desirable around the performance of the two models. Their apparent lust for one another transferred a similar emotional ‘aura’ onto the Chanel atomiser, Dior underwear and antique rosewood drawers. The props in the room all worked to authenticate an image of a lifestyle with the passionate performance of the models acting as a catalyst for this transfer of affective intensity. As a further influence on my research, my experience illustrated to me how desire can decentre the self and provoke the actualisation of a more glamorous ‘reality’ through fantasy. For those brief moments I was glaring at my hopeful future. The movement of the models in this setting instantaneously impinged upon my body. Although this moment of intensity preceded my cognitive ability to articulate it, the thinking that occurred in that instant was of an embodied form. For an affective connection having been made, becomes pinned to the body after which it is
instantly experienced as felt emotion, the intensity of which will determine whether it remains (or how long for) on the body.

‘The Master Mimic’

I have chosen to adopt an orienting device as a means of framing my research. The objective is to capture the ineffable affective intensities that shape dispositions and alter perception. I have chosen to use a short story within the epic of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. This is a Latin narrative poem that comprises fifteen books and over two hundred and fifty myths. One of the major underlying themes of the book as the title would suggest, is transformation. Additionally, where vicarious consumption is concerned, this Latin epic also examines desire, transformation, ethereality and artistry. Of the fifteen books, I have chosen *Book XI* and the tragic tale of King Ceyx and Alcyone. Within this story, I refer specifically to the character of Morpheus as a metaphor for how the cultural intermediary creates a connection that resonates with individuals, making them believe in the ‘dream’ woven by her/his artistry.

*Book XI* tells the tale of King Ceyx and Alcyone, a husband and wife so deeply in love that they longed to be by each other’s side forever. However the King’s brother had attempted to throw himself from the cliffs in a moment of anguish. In their pity, the Gods transformed Ceyx’s brother into a bird thus preventing his death. In a bid to understand his brother’s eventual fate, Ceyx sets sail to Claros, where the sacred Apollo can shed light on events. When halfway across the sea, the ship encounters a violent storm during which King Ceyx is drowned. In his final moments, he calls out for Alcyone and prays that his body might be returned to her. Unaware of her husband’s fate, Alcyone kneels at Juno’s altar every day and prays fervently for his safe return. Unable to bear Alycone’s appeals for her dead husband any longer, Juno dispatches her servant Iris to the House of Sleep where she is to order the King Somnus (God of Sleep) to send Alcyone a dream figure in the shape of the dead King to inform her of his true fate.

The House of Sleep was located secretly in the mountains hidden by luxuriant poppies which covered the entrance. Upon reaching the ebony couch covered with luxurious cushions and quilts where Somnus lay, Iris delivered her message. The contagious intensity of the House was such that Iris became overwhelmed by the urge to sleep and barely possessed the strength to deliver her message to a perpetually dozing Somnus. Upon doing so, she quickly left. Having been granted the order, King Somnus had to choose from his thousands of sons who took the form of empty dreams lying on the ground. Of his sons, Somnus chose Morpheus to transform

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into the dead king and enact Juno’s order. He chose Morpheus as he was by far the most skilled at imitating any human shape. The extent of his artistry led to him becoming known as ‘the master mimic’.

Importantly, Morpheus did not just mirror the appearance of that which others desired. Rather, his transformation was fully embodied. He became the person he was tasked with imitating. As well as physical appearance, this involved mimicking that person’s speech, the way that person stands, walks, their facial expressions, tone of voice, clothing etc. Upon his father’s command, Morpheus flew to the city of Trachis where outside Alcyone’s bedroom, he adopted the guise of her late husband. While soaking wet, Morpheus (Ceyx) informs Alcyone of the shipwreck. As Morpheus (Ceyx) began to weep, he instructed her to enact the traditional mourning rituals so that he might find peace in the afterlife. Sobbing frantically, Alcyone desperately grasps in vain to hold his ‘real’ vision of her husband band be fore he di sappears. Upon w a king, a n inconsolable Alcyone cries profusely while tearing at her clothes and beating her chest unable to bear her grief. She longs to be with her dead King once more.

The next morning by the seashore, she stands by the very spot on which she kissed her husband goodbye as he departed. Staring out to sea, she notices a body that initially, she presumes to be a dead sailor. As the body drifts closer, Alcyone recognises the body as that of her late husband and begins to tremble as she tears at her skin and clothes in fervent anguish. On the edge of the water was a barrier constructed to weaken the force of the tide by the time it reached the beach. The body became stuck at this point and could not come further to the shore. Although inhumanly possible to reach, Alcyone leapt from the cliffs and was transformed into a bird. When she reached his lifeless body, she kissed his lips with her beak, wrapping Ceyx in her wings for warmth. The Gods took pity on them and they were both transformed into birds, and reunited yet again.

With its initial beginnings in Ancient Greek literature, the concept of Morpheus is one that permeates various contexts that can help shed further light on its relevance to the influence of cultural intermediaries. Morpheus also features in Homer’s Odyssey during which he also lures people to dream and fades their nightmares into sweet visions. While hovering over King Ulysses’ who is in the throes of a hellish nightmare, Morpheus declines to sweeten the king’s dreams. He does so because he knows that the king is a hero and must witness the cruel voyage that lay before him. Also in the Odyssey, Morpheus and both brothers embark on a nightly routine during which they emerge through one of two gates. One is made of horn and the other,
ivory. It is said that Morpheus always passes through the horn gate carrying with him prophetic, true dreams. His brothers pass through the gate of ivory bringing with them false dreams of no significant meaning. Homer writes that ‘Dreams surely are difficult, confusing, and not everything in them is brought to pass for mankind. For fleeting dreams have two gates: one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those which pass through the one of sawn ivory are deceptive, bringing tidings which come to light, but those which issue from the one of polished horn bring true results when a mortal sees them’ (Book VI: 107).

Similarly, the character of Morpheus in the popular film franchise The Matrix acted as a gatekeeper between two worlds. His capacity to mediate these worlds is conveyed when Morpheus offers Neo the opportunity to perpetually live in a world of illusion by consuming a blue pill or, to re-enter the harsh world of reality by consuming a red pill. Furthermore, the pain relief drug morphine was named after the Greek God when discovered by Friedrich Wilhelm Sertturner in 1805. Appropriately, consumption of the drug induces sleep and numbs pain while also altering a person’s mood and perception of reality. Its blissful potency has made it very addictive.

The recurrent themes of transcendence, desire and artistry embodied by the character of Morpheus is useful to help reflect on the story told by this research on cultural intermediaries. In his numerous incarnations, Morpheus is presented as a deity that forges a connection with others and mediates their lull into imaginative fantasy. Similarly, upon being affected by a flow of intense energies, enchanted bodies transcend to an ethereal world away from the mundane, ordinariness of their present reality. The desire for emancipation to this transcendent reality must be triggered by a ‘messenger’. From a consumer culture perspective, the rarefied affective capacity of Morpheus is embodied by cultural intermediaries. Like Morpheus, intermediaries’ capacities to mobilise affect is critical as it forges a non-rational connection with bodies, making the consumption experience resonate. The emotional tie forged by intermediaries’ impacts bodies, transforming their perception of what is real and imaginary. I conceptualise intermediaries of late capitalist culture as deities, sent to animate authentic imagery of fabricated realities, the affective capacity of which provokes our worship.
1. Introduction

‘In front of the cavern’s mouth luxuriant poppies are blooming, with numberless herbs from whose juices sleep is distilled by the dewy night and sprinkled over the darkened lands of the earth’

Ovid XI: 452.

1.1 Research Aims and Questions

Adopting high fashion as a context of study, this research thesis explores how cultural intermediaries mobilise affect to ultimately make consumption experiences resonate with individuals in a unique and emotional way. Resonance has been described as ‘a product of the pleasures and satisfactions that audiences derive from advertising images’ (Patterson et al. 2009: 16). The responsibility of high fashion ads, or ‘commodity narratives’ (Goldman and Papson 1996: 2), is not to represent objective reality but rather, ‘to inspire dreams’ (Atik and Firat 2013: 849). When consumption experiences resonate with viewers, they invite, or ‘hail’ (Goldman and Papson 1996: 91) individuals to imagine themselves existing as, or in relation to the ideal subject, in the transcendent reality mediated.

In this contemporary era of non-rational, emotional and existential consumption, cultural intermediaries work to command viewers’ recognition and trigger their affective investment in such fictive narratives. The animation of distinct experiences through mediatory processes offers structure and stability to consumers’ lives. To date, the cultural intermediary has largely been studied from a representational approach (Bourdieu 1984; 1996; McCracken 1986; 1989; Callon et al. 2002; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; Molloy and Larner 2010). That is, our knowledge of cultural mediation has been enhanced by the reproduction of ‘received structures, orders and norms’ (Firat and Dholakia 2006: 132) and the application of institutionalised concepts to cultural markets (Hill et al. 2014).

Within CCT, the cornerstone of such research has been M cCracken (1986). The author identifies cultural intermediaries within belief systems of fashion and advertising as those who define the object-meaning relation and diffuse its symbolic va lues to consumers. The consumption experience resonates when the viewer is affected by the stimuli of the ad and recognises ‘sameness’ in the image (McCracken 1986: 75). Yet given their integral position in
mediating these experiences, unanswered questions remain as to how recognition of ‘sameness’ is compelled and the experience made meaningful. While McCracken (1986) acknowledges the role of cultural intermediation, he does not explicitly articulate what cultural intermediaries actually do during this process.

In answering the ‘cry out’ (Canniford 2012: 405) for new ways of enhancing such knowledge, this research adopts a non-representational approach (Hill et al. 2014) to the study of cultural intermediaries. This seeks to further enrich the contributions made by representational thought on cultural mediation. A non-representational approach foregrounds the expressive, imaginative and affective aspects of consumption. It also facilitates an articulation of the crucial ‘minutiae’ (Hill et al. 2014) and unarticulated constituents of cultural mediation that would otherwise go unnoticed in the ‘grand scheme’ (Bajde 2013: 237) of the consumption experience.

Specifically, this research focuses on ‘affect’. This is a concept that has been adopted in different contexts across various disciplines. Within CCT, the term has received very little acknowledgement (Elliot 1998; Hill et al. 2014) due to the predominant focus on semiotic and representational approaches. Affect is an omnipresent life energy, the mobilisation of which through fluid embodied performance can invoke intensified pangs of vitality in bodies in relation. Given that individuals possess ‘porous boundaries’ (Thrift 2008: 85), the contagious nature of these circulated affective energies can become our own (Hill et al. 2014; Blackman 2008; Brennan 2004). Upon being affected, bodies’ tastes and dispositions can be shaped to mimic the sensibilities and subjective reality of the cultural intermediary and his/her world. In other words, the affected body has his/her experiences of the world and subsequent consumption patterns (which is what we use to negotiate the world) shaped by the affecting presence of the intermediary.

Important to note is that by ‘bodies in relation’, this research refers specifically to other tastemakers in the field rather than consumers. Tastemakers in this instance refers to bookers, photographers, designers, stylists, fashion models etc. all of whom work to suffuse the aesthetic experience of high fashion with affect in one way or another (as my data will demonstrate). Thus, given the greater need for a producer-oriented approach, I felt a thesis on cultural mediation should serve to delineate the processes of these producers. The interpretations drawn can then be combined with what we already know of consumer behaviour to form a more all-encompassing illustration of the aesthetic consumption experience. Thus, from the perspective
of how dispositions are shaped and an influential affective tie created toward the aesthetic consumption experience, our knowledge of cultural intermediaries’ impact is rather limited. An appreciation of the affective energies that influence bodies would greatly enhance our understanding of how cultural intermediaries mediate such captivating consumption experiences.

To this end, the core research question of this thesis is; how do cultural intermediaries mobilise affect? To further clarify, the concept of affect forwarded here aligns with the nature of consumption experiences described by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Elliott (1998), Joy and Sherry (2003) and Dion and Arnould (2011). As noted, this research conceptualises affect as those pre-discursive, embodied intensities that pass between bodies inducing change in those affected. Affect can thus be described as a type of ‘energy, sensation and a force that drives things, that encourages bodily and social movements. It is human; it is what keeps everything else alive’ (Wittel 2004: 18). Its omnipresence and contagious nature allow it to ‘leap between and take hold of bodies without an individual’s volition’ (Hill et al. 2014: 388). Its mobilisation is integral to the animation of aesthetic experiences that impact bodies’ perceptions of reality.

A further point is that, technically, affect differs from ‘emotion’ in that it precedes it (Hill et al. 2014). Emotion refers to the ‘capture, closing and naming of affect’ (Wissinger 2007b: 260). We might also describe emotion as ‘the ideological attempt to make sense of some affective productions’ (Grossberg 2010: 316). Yet given that we can only experience affect before it translates to emotion, there is a fluidity that exists between both concepts with respect to the consumption experience. This has been acknowledged by Elliott (1998), Arnould and Price (1993) and Ahmed (2004) who contextualise emotion as a pre-cognitive, embodied and non-rational intensity. As affect and emotion are crucially inerlinked, this research adopts the position taken by the aforementioned authors and also uses affect and emotion as constituent parts of the same intense, transcendent consumption experience. Furthermore, the conceptual ‘slipperiness’ or intangibility of affect as it pertains to cultural mediation has led this research to embrace the theoretical framework proposed by Smith-Matthews and Maguire (2012). This outlines three dimensions to better articulate my core research question. These are ‘framing’, ‘expertise’ and ‘impact’.

Cultural intermediaries frame ‘goods (products, services, ideas, behaviours) as legitimate and worthy points of attachment for intended receivers’ (Smith Matthews and Maguire 2012: 554). The ‘expertise’ with which they mobilise affect to frame the aesthetic experience, distinguishes
their cultural legitimacy in a given field (Smith-Matthews and Maguire 2012). Finally, their cultural mediation creates impact, as the cultural product they have framed is legitimated as authentic and desirable. As a theoretical construct, this framework provides a helpful tool with which to address my core research question. However, its lack of theoretical development and empirical support has produced three sub-questions that this work also addresses.

The first of which is; how does cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect help frame the consumption experience? Intermediaries frame consumption through immaterial forms of labour that legitimate consumption patterns and lifestyles as desirable. We already understand that the contagious nature of the intensities mobilised during this work impacts bodies in relation (Massumi 2002; Hemmings 2005) and creates an affective attachment to a branded lifestyle. Yet the embodied circulation of affect that creates this non-rational, emotional tie remains shrouded behind a veil of romanticism and mystique. This point is supported by Beck (2003: 3) who notes that ‘within the cultural industries the notion is endlessly reproduced that cultural work is special and mysterious and can only be undertaken by special and mysterious people’. I posit that cultural intermediaries retain their mysterious, rarefied air due to the subtle expertise with which they perform their cultural labour.

This raises a further question to be addressed; how do cultural intermediaries develop the expertise for the mobilisation of affect? Expertise allows intermediaries to subtly mediate taste, but also affirms their cultural legitimacy and elevation within the field (Bourdieu 1985). They become distinguished from consumers based on their rare expertise that grants them a unique ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1990). ‘The game’ in this instance refers to the mobilisation of affect to create an emotional tie and subsequent affective investment in the aesthetic consumption experience. The rare cultural capital commanded by intermediaries makes their laborious performances appear ‘natural’ (Bourdieu 1984) and therefore, mysterious or special (Beck 2003). This ‘allows for social distinction and activates forces of differentiation in terms of taste, social identity and cultural capital’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007: 26). The various processes by which they accrue the various forms of capital necessary to mobilise affect are of interest to this research.

The third and final sub-question of this research is; can we identify the impact made by the mobilisation of affect? Smith-Matthews and Maguire (2012) conceptualise impact as the conferring of cultural legitimacy upon a consumer good. As they note, a consumer good can extend to a product, service, idea, behaviour, experience etc. Moreover, impact can be further
articulated as the conferring of cultural intermediaries’ legitimacy upon the consumption experience through contagion. Undoubtedly, further empirical investigation is required to delineate this aspect of cultural mediation. Yet based on extant theoretical contributions, we understand that the mobilisation of affect impacts bodies by attaching to, and triggering bodies’ affective resonances (Elliott 1998). The affective response felt upon impact causes the individual to suspend disbelief (Elliott 1997), engage imagination (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Goulding 2002; Joy and Sherry 2003) and allow the affecting presence of the intermediary to become their own (Hill et al. 2014; Blackman 2008; Brennan 2004).

Of course, while every perception results in an affective response to a greater or lesser extent (Berger 1972), it must be acknowledged that this is not always one of enchantment. As illustrated in Thompson and Haytko (1997), there are those who feel forlorn by the affective capacity of high fashion imagery and exert agency in disengaging their identity from the high fashion world and dis-authenticating it as “false” or “a dream” (Parmentier and Fischer 2011). While this is important to acknowledge, of greater interest to this research are those who are absorbed into this reality and more specifically, the cultural agents that frame this reality as transcendent.

1.2 High Fashion as a Context

To address these questions, I have decided to utilise the context of high fashion. In beginning this research, I was presented with various fashion contexts within which I could situate my study, namely, high fashion, commercial and haute couture. Firstly, haute couture refers to an exclusive fashionable garment that has been entirely hand crafted. These garments are generally not considered by price but rather by the time, intricacy and aesthetic impact held by the creation. In contemporary society, haute couture refers to a distinct group of fashion designer/brands who meet incredibly high aesthetic standards e.g. Christian Dior, Givenchy, Christophe Josse. In these images for instance, the handcrafted nature of the garments are clearly evocative of a rare artistry. All three are slightly transparent with various different

1 Made up of energies, moods, feelings etc. (Hill et al. 2014)
2 In this neo-liberal age, fashion and consumption has come to replace past individual agency and expression related to prayer, religion and pilgrimage. From a producer perspective, I am very interested in how these individuals mediate consumption experiences that many believe in as a source of salvation and spiritual nutrition.
3 Also described within CCT as ‘luxury fashion’ (Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Firat and Atik 2013; Joy et al. 2014).
4 Appendix A
materials used in the design process. This combined with the striking appearance and their dominant poses are also quite affective and accentuate the artistry of the design. The distinction between haute couture and other fashion contexts therefore lies in its handcrafted designs and primarily its invitation-only membership to the term. However, it should also be noted that the separation in terminology between all possible contexts is relatively indiscriminate.

Commercial fashion for example refers to the apparel rather than fashion industry. That is, it specialises in selling accessible, high-street, fashionable clothing to everyday people for an affordable price. In high fashion, commercial is generally considered plain, safe, boring and various other synonyms associated with its mass-market appeal\(^5\). These various terms originate from commercial fashion’s (arguably superficial) focus on the physical body as illustrated in the *A&F* image (See Appendix B). Here, the male torso is the sole resource of brand value and even surpasses the brand logo. Similarly, *Levis* adopt an underlying sexual theme while also investing in the popular/rock music genre in an attempt to sell their factory/mass produced denim products. *H&M* are also quite ‘safe’ in their designs and imagery that features quite traditional colours, designs and fabrics. Yet having said that, if the brand logo was removed, one could potentially interpret this as high fashion. The intangible distinction between commercial and high is captured nicely by Dion and Arnould (2011) who note that commercial fashion focuses more on the consumer while still attempting to emulate high fashion by adopting trends inspired by this context and re-appropriating them. Yet, while focusing on fashionability, commercial fashion is largely about community, customer satisfaction and widespread functional comfort.

Contrastingly, high fashion is more producer-oriented and dependent on generating awe rather than community (Dion and Arnould 2011)\(^6\). As well as being inscribed in cultural tradition or heritage (a well-defined narrative), high fashion generates such awe (referred to as ‘magic’ by some respondents) by focusing to a greater extent on the multi-sensory, affect-rich, aesthetic nature of the consumption experience rather than the product solely. High fashion therefore evokes its appeal based on an amalgamation between handcraft skills, a charismatic brand image and awesome consumption experience that enshrouds it with an enviable rarity while obfuscating its link to the mass market. These traits are clearly illustrated by the Louis Vuitton fashion shows that depict surreal scenarios designed to entertain and mesmerise rather

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\(^5\) Appendix B

\(^6\) Appendix C
than sell fashionable albeit functional clothing. Similarly, Tom Ford promotes a more striking image and uses its prolific association with a three-piece suit to convey the spirit of high fashion. Interestingly, many commercial brands (particularly H&M) have begun to collaborate with these high fashion brands in an attempt to take advantage of this charismatic legitimacy. For the high fashion brand, it is a chance to produce and release a ‘different’ type of collection more directed toward a mass market. While it must be mentioned that this is a risky strategy, it has had some advantages for brands/designers such as Givenchy, Isabel Laurent and Lanvin.

As illustrated by these images, compared to the original image of H&M, the collaboration has infused the commercial H&M brand with a new ‘personality’ or ‘attitude’ in the form of colours, styles, expressions that were originally missing.

From this perspective, the emphasis on and subsequent mediation of aesthetic/affective consumption experiences makes high fashion a very interesting context within which to undertake a study of cultural intermediaries and their mobilisation of affect. Furthermore, high fashion is an area that has received significant attention in CCT and facilitated the production of fruitful contributions to understanding of diverse aspects of consumption (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Wagner, in Holbrook 1999; Murray 2002; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011; 2013; Atik and Firat 2013; Megehee and Spake 2012; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). For example, extant literature observes how high fashion, being rooted in its projection of an aspirational future, envelops consumers in a fantasy structure through the production of both captivating imagery and multi-sensorial experiences in store (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Joy et al. 2014). The avant-garde artistic orientation of many luxury stores (Venkatesh et al. 2010; Joy et al. 2014) stimulates the senses and enchants the consumer to project an aura of ‘magic’ onto the consumption experience. Further studies theoretically articulate how a charismatic persona, such as that of the creative director, can enhance luxury retail strategy due to its enchanting influence on consumers (Dion and Arnould 2011).

This research proposes a further contextualisation for high fashion as a field in which intensified consumption experiences are mediated by arbiters of taste. I suggest that the aesthetic capacity of this field to invoke non-rational, emotive and variegated consumption experiences makes it an ideal milieu within which to undertake an exploration of cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect. For instance, a core theorisation is that value in this ‘magical’ field is aesthetic. That is, consumption of high fashion is an intrinsically ‘pure’

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7 Appendix D
experience (Wagner 1999; Bourdieu 1985). Purity evades a rational deduction as its effects are ‘immediate, perceptual and emotional’ (Postrel 2003: 6). Aesthetics are also best described as ‘an affective force’ (Thrift 2010: 292). The affective intensity constitutive of an aesthetic consumption connects bodies and invokes experiences of (rationally) unobtainable realities. As aesthetics have long been philosophically associated with art and taste, their consumption elevates those with the cultural capacity to consume them to ‘the model life’ (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006).

Through the framework of this ‘model life’, the consumption experience can therefore be emancipatory (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008), as bodies’ affective resonances are triggered (Elliott 1998) upon contact with an affective stimulus. Upon provocation of a response, the affected body begins to imaginatively consume ‘fictions that have taken up residence in reality’ (Wood 2005: 12). This idea is core to my research as I posit cultural intermediaries’ creation of an affective tie with bodies as being central to the legitimization of the model life as authentic and desirable. Cultural intermediaries’ framing of this experience as ethereal also confers elevated status onto the aesthetic object (image, brand, product etc.) within this world, transmuting it to ‘wearable art’ (Venkatesh et al. 2010: 461; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014).

Importantly, the artistic ideologies that have been commandeered by high fashion necessitate rarefied cultural capital to understand and consume (Mears 2008). Like ‘fashion’, the term art is a diverse term. Thus, to clarify, I use the term artistic ideologies as they have been already adopted in CCT research (Goulding 2002; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). That is, this work uses artistic ideologies to connote institutionalised acts of consumption and production, the fluidity/affective capacity of which are intended to disavow any relation to material accumulation and ordinary experience. Instead, art in high fashion refers to the suffusion of the consumption experience with rare affective intensity, the impact of which can absorb the affected body into a transcendent reality (Holbrook and Hirachman 1982). Thus, while artistic imagery pervades late capitalist culture via the media, a manufactured rarity and elusiveness remains, which has long been characteristic of both high art and high fashion (Parmentier and Fischer 2007). The enduring duality between accessibility and restriction evokes a captivating air of mystique that enthralls the field, thereby perpetuating its cultural rarity and legitimating its avant-garde tastes (Holt 1998; Bourdieu 1985).
The notion of manufactured rarity is important as high fashion, despite its artistic endeavours and proliferation of ‘pure’ consumption experiences is still rooted in the marketplace. Indeed, I argue that in late capitalism, both high fashion and high art can never be totally separate from the market. Yet high fashion’s association with the cultural value of high art elevates it to a higher purpose where the affective capacity of its aesthetic invokes sensory stimulation which engages the affected body’s imagination thereby overriding any affiliation with commercial ends (Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). To further reiterate, the reliance of high fashion on aesthetics to create and legitimate this transcendent world demands greater attention on the consumption and production processes of cultural intermediaries as they frame the experience as separate from economic/corporate interests. Crucial to note is their mediation of an affective stimulus that negates rationale and engages imagination.

From this perspective, we can better understand the emancipatory consumption experience mediated by high fashion intermediaries through acknowledging extant CCT research on vicarious nostalgia (Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002). I argue that both consumption experiences are affective and consumed through imagination. Both require the presence of affective stimuli to invoke an affective response and establish an emotional attachment to the experience. ‘Nostalgia’ is best described as a complex emotional state of bittersweet longing during which we filter out negative connotations and adopt an intensely exaggerated fondness for an idealised past (Goulding 1999; Davis 1979). It has also been acknowledged that the ‘past’ from which we glean such pleasure need not be confined to our personal lived experience (Chase and Shaw 1989). Rather, we can engage with idealised depictions of a past vicariously through consuming nostalgic stimuli (Holak and Havlena 1992) embodied in stories, images and possessions (Belk 1988; Stern 1992; Goulding 1999). For example, studies have observed how the affective connection made by a piece of music (Holbrook and Schindler 1989; 1991), a perfume scent (Goulding 2002) or a work of art (Goulding 1999; 2001) can provoke within the consumer, a strong, imaginative longing for the past.

In this way, nostalgia can be treated as a consumption experience (Goulding 2001). For existential consumers (Elliott 1997), the goods that embody nostalgic triggers are consumed to ameliorate the upheaval of affective resonances felt in the present while providing an escape to an alternate, more idealised reality. This being the case, I argue the imaginative habitation of a past or future is its elf a consumption experience. In the same way that ‘existential nostalgics’ (Goulding 1999) might consume works of art, high fashion resonates with existential consumers (Elliott 1997) based on cultural arbiters’ mediation and legitimation of
self-illusory, he donic c onsumption e xperiences (Campbell 1987). In ot her w ords, t heir mobilisation of affect is central to creating an emotional connection that resonates with bodies in relation thereby facilitating their ‘dream’. Although positioned in the future, the model life animated by cultural intermediaries remains credible, as its truthfulness is judged ‘not by the real fulfilment of its promises, but by the relevance of its fantasies to those of the spectator-buyer’ (Berger 1972:146). Thus, intermediaries’ circulation of affect during cultural mediation serves to ‘offer the illusion of such a link rather than its material manifestation’ (Negus 2002:509).

High fashion is therefore clearly an affect-rich context where value is dependent on the mobilisation of affective intensities to legitimate illusory experiences. Before delving deeper into these processes, to follow is an illustration of the parameters that surround my discipline, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), and the extant discussions of high fashion that pervade it. As none of these research streams are mutually exclusive (Arnould and Thompson 2005), their accumulated discussions of fashion from various perspectives has been very helpful in creating a basis for my research.

1.3 High Fashion in CCT

1.3.1 Consumer Identity Projects

This stream embraces the malleability of the body and seeks to understand the various processes by which individuals commodify their bodies during negotiation of a coherent identity project (e.g. Ahuvia 2005; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 1988; Cherrier and Murray 2007; Cushman 1990; Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Fournier 1998; Goulding and Saren 2009; Holt 1995; McCracken 1986; Murray 2002; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011; Patterson and Elliott 2002; Sandicki and Ger 2010; Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Central to the notion of bodies as projects is the belief that the body is a fluid entity and must be constantly maintained through the judicious use of commodities and body work in order to reflect a desired cultural and fashionable ideal (Patterson and Elliott 2002). Identity is now no longer confined to physical appearance but instead refers to one’s entire embodied self (Shilling 1993; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Budgen 2003). Thus, transformation as Budgen (2003) notes, demands not just a change to surface appearance but also a concomitant change to how the body is lived. In this sense, the surface of the body is

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8 A convincing daydream or fantasy created with such authenticity that the consumer believes it to be real.
conceptualised as an extrinsic cue to the beliefs, ideas, consumption habits, desires etc. that constitute the inner self.

In high fashion, discourses of what is ‘fashionable’ abound, urging consumers to adopt certain patterns of consumption or risk their character being drawn into question. Thompson and Haytko (1997) and Murray (2002) argue that the consumer is an interpretive agent who both embraces and resists certain discourses to facilitate her/his construction of a desired self. The consumer’s alignment with social and cultural viewpoints as Murray (2002) argues, is a result of the meanings that (s)he rejects as much as those which (s)he embraces. For instance, one respondent from Thompson and Haytko’s (1997) study describes how she is completely enraptured by the glamour of luxury fashion and views it as a realm upon which to project her dreams of a similar lifestyle. Alternatively, as another respondent shows, one can dismiss the world of high fashion as vapid, superficial and manipulative (Thompson and Haytko 1997).

To act as an arbiter of cultural taste, the intermediary must transform her/his identity and become increasingly reflective of the lifestyle which (s)he mediates. Appropriation of certain consumption styles and patterns distinguish identities based on shared meanings and values (Joy et al. 2010). The expertise with which intermediaries negotiate their identities in a contested consumption space will be stow her/him with greater capital and subsequent belonging to the elite domain. Intermediaries’ legitimation of a fashionable identity as aspirational edges consumers ever closer to approximating the prevailing high fashion aesthetic in the hope of actualising their imagined fantasy (Thompson and Haytko 1997).

1.3.2 Socio-historic Patterning of Consumption

This domain explores the institutional and social structures that influence consumption such as class, ethnicity and gender (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The research question that drives this stream revolves around the constituents that sustain consumer society. Contributions in this vein have produced findings that illustrate how consumption is shaped by social class hierarchies (Allen 2002; Holt 1997, 1998; Wallendorf 2001), gender (Bristor and Fischer 1993; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Thompson 1996; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989), ethnicity (Belk 1992; Mehta and Belk 1991; Reilly and Wallendorf 1987; Wallendorf and Reilly 1983) and institutions such as family (Moore-Shay, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Ward and Reingen 1990).
From a high fashion perspective, Thompson and Haytko (1997) investigate how consumers experience and interpret fashion discourses through a gendered lens. Their focus is directed to how consumers use these discourses to construct narratives of identity and appropriate gender roles. Consumers’ agency in embracing or dismissing fashionable conceptions of gender is analysed. The research concludes that competing discourses are grounded in the ideologies that constitute social interaction. Consumers exert considerable agency in reworking these discourses and shaping their identities. For example, for women, a salient image that was largely resisted was that of an anorexic model (Thompson and Haytko 1997). While the authors’ research deals with issues of gender, it also pertains strongly to consumer identity projects and showcases the mutual inclusivity of these streams.

Murray (2002) criticises Thompson and Haytko (1997) for prioritising a ‘sign experimentation’ (agency) perspective and failing to acknowledge ‘sign domination’ (structure). To briefly explain, ‘experimentation’ analyses consumption as an expressive movement (Levy 1981) wherein the consumer does not experience any constraints in the creation of a fashionable identity. ‘Domination’ on the other hand, eliminates agency in favour of structural processes. According to Murray (2002), this exists where the classification system drives fashion toward its own interests resulting in the reflection of social order and reproduction of inequalities. The result of such forces creates a consumer ethic built on false promises fuelled by a desire for that which will remain perpetually out of reach (Murray 2002). One might argue that given the perpetual nature of desire, this ethic of false promises already exists not due to the classification system but rather, the premium placed on cultural capital to consume these imaginary and coded narratives.

Parmentier and Fischer (2007: 29) add clarity to this discussion by noting that ‘while sign experimentation in identity construction may be perfectly feasible for actors who are largely peripheral to a contested symbolic space, sign domination may limit identity projects for those who wish to be actors well within the boundaries of that symbolic space’. By their very nature, cultural intermediaries must operate at the core of high fashion if they are to mediate cultural notions of taste to audiences. In other words, they must believe in the aesthetic values they mediate if they are to seduce affective investment from viewers (Bourdieu 1984).

On this point, rather than consider tastes as solely a class phenomenon (Bourdieu 1984), Holt (1998) observes how taste formation is inextricably linked to cultural capital. In high fashion, Blumer (1969) also posits that due to various technological and cultural shifts, fashion is no
longer appropriated to communicate class position. Instead, the desired end state aspired to by a fashion consumer is to be considered ‘in fashion’. This is an important piece of specialist terminology within this field. ‘In fashion’ is constituted by cultural capital and refers to individuals’ embodiment of the ‘spirit of the times’; ‘to be abreast of what has good standing, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world’ (Blumer 1969: 282). To be legitimated as ‘in fashion’ confers significant cultural capital upon individuals and affirms their belonging in this restricted field.

1.3.3 Marketplace Cultures

This stream investigates how particular cultures or social groups are formed through shared consumption activities (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002; Schouten and Alexander 1995). These shared activities produce consumption worlds (Holt 1995) wherein individuals foster shared feelings, meanings and perspectives. In the same way that Star Trek fans (Kozinets 2001) or bikers (Schouten and Alexander 1995) exist as a subculture or culture of consumption, so too do cultural arbiters of high fashion. To understand the role of aesthetics in shaping cultural tastes, previous work on themed shopping environments such as ‘Nike Town’ (Peñaloza 1998), ‘ESPN Zone’ (Sherry et al. 2001) and luxury fashion (Joy et al. 2014) is particularly helpful. These consumption spaces foreground the interactive and experiential as the consumer negotiates an architecturally designed, themed spatial environment. Luxury fashion research has also focused on the architecture of the store as a facilitator of shared cultural orientations (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Atik and Firtat 2013; Joy et al. 2014).

Since the 1980s, high fashion institutions have increasingly drawn attention away from the materiality of the product and focussed more on the emotional, dreamlike experience that results in a affinity between the consumer and brand (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Belk and Costa 1998; Joy and Sherry 2003). The numerous multisensory triggers experienced upon entering a luxury fashion store can activate the senses and transport the consumer to a reality explicitly separate to that from which they have just come. Afflicting the senses, these aesthetic cues affect beneath the level of cognitive awareness. As such, consumers’ rationality is suspended in favour of imagination, fantasy and

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9 Music, fragrance, aesthetic appearance, interaction with staff, clothing, architecture etc. I refer particularly to Dior creative director who described the flagship store in Paris as a fantasy.
dreams wherein (s)he consumes an alternate, more desirable reality (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982).

However, both Dion and Arnould (2011) and Joy et al. (2014) argue that luxury fashion is a consumption context whose ideologies differ from other institutions that prioritise experiential consumption. For example, rather than the notion of ‘the spectacular’ (Peñaloza 1998), luxury fashion brands are organised around the iconic and charismatic persona of the brand’s creative director. This persona is managed by affirming the creative director as an ‘artist’, whose designs are ‘works of art’ inspired by their unique vision (Dion and Arnould 2011). Through consecration rituals such as fashion shows, the creative director’s magical aura becomes reinforced and consumers’ belief in the legitimacy of the brand deeper ingrained. This idea is at odds with Kozinets et al. (2002) who argue that experience is generated from a consumer focus. An important characteristic of this context therefore is that unlike ESPN Zone (Kozinets et al. 2002), where the consumer co-creates the experience, luxury fashion foregrounds the productive activities of those on the ‘front line’ (Dion and Arnould 2011: 513) that mediate consumption experiences. To continue down the path forged by Dion and Arnould (2011) and Joy et al. (2014) would thus yield significant contributions to help further understand cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation.

1.3.4 Mass Mediated Marketplace Ideologies

This stream of research often intersects with others as CCT researchers deconstruct the marketplace ideologies that embed popular culture texts such as advertisements, television and film. In doing so, they contribute to our understanding of consumer behaviour by analysing how ideologies ‘hail’ (Goldman and Papson 1996) consumers to step into the commodity mirror and become the object of their desires (Williamson 1978). Upon being recruited, the consumer recognises her/himself as belonging in the same ethereal context as the ideal subject. Upon the creation of an affective connection (that is, the trigger of the viewer’s deep affective resonances), (s)he is exalted to the distinct world depicted, where the restrictions imposed by objective reality are obliterated. In the example of Australian female surf wear brand Roxy’s #WhoAmIJustGuess campaign, I argue that in certain cases, the viewer recognises him/herself as part of the same context of the ideal subject. That is, they can mimic the sensibilities and attributes of the ethereal world depicted without becoming the ideal subject. For instance, rather than imaginatively consume as the ideal subject, many men consume the lifestyle.

10 Appendix E
contextualised and thus, may imaginatively recognise themselves in relation to the ideal subject of the ad.

This research understands ideologies as ‘the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (Althusser 1971: 162). Challenging the simplistic nature of Marx’s formulation, Althusser (1971) notes how consuming ideologies facilitates one’s experience of ‘reality’. Importantly, this reality need not be ‘real’ but can be imagined. Furthermore, ideology is shaped through the unconscious as it encounters social forces such as economies and institutions (Sturkin and Cartwright 2001). Based on Althusser’s (1971) argument, cultural intermediaries’ embodiment and subsequent mediation of high fashion’s artistic ideologies create a portal through which individuals’ are free to consume an alternate reality vicariously.

Ideologies are therefore the ‘laces that tie a society together and the forms that define what, for a given society, are ‘real’, an ‘established order’ (Thompson 1982:665). In other words, when we live in society, we live in ideologies (Sturkin and Cartwright 2001:51). Cultural mediation is crucial to this end as it naturalises the various ideas and beliefs that constitute a particular lifestyle. The consumption and production processes of this distinct group embed these ideologies in a cultural paradigm. Once naturalised, ideologies continue to influence behaviour and maintain the dominant ideas and beliefs that constitute the cultural context (Hirschman 1993).

For example, to extend its existing description, ‘in fashion’ refers to a tacit understanding and embodiment of the requisite qualities/ideologies that grant residence at the vanguard of aesthetic taste and belonging to fashion’s proximate future (Blumer 1969). Those at this vanguard can only mediate the artistic ideologies that constitute ‘in fashion’ as fashion trends possess a distinct line of continuity (Blumer 1969) and are borne out of this position. Thus, cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect creates a motional tie to the ideologies embedded in the consumption experience. The animation of this reality through intermediaries’ circulation of affect makes it resonate with individuals thereby shaping their embodied perceptions and affective investment in an imaginary, yet albeit, authentic reality.

1.4 Conclusion and Thesis Outline

To enrich current understandings, this research adopts a non-representational approach to studying cultural intermediaries. This method foregrounds the non-rational, imaginative and emotive aspects of consumption by focusing on the felt intensities that pass between bodies
and influence behaviour. A non-representational mode of theorising is also well equipped to
deal with some of the unarticulated aspects of cultural mediation. For example, previous
research on affect (Hill et al. 2014; Thrift 2008; 2010; Blackman 2008; Brennan 2004) would
suggest that the contagious flow of energies from one body to another alters one’s embodied
perception of reality and shapes the enduring dispositions of the affected body.

To this end, the main research question this thesis addresses is: how do cultural intermediaries
mobilise affect? Affect refers to a contagious, pre-discursive, embodied life energy that passes
between bodies. While affect translates consciously as emotion, the fluidity between the two
embodied states has led Arnould and Price (1993), Elliott (1998), Ahmed (2004) and this
research to use the terms as equally important to the experience. That is, we can only grasp and
understand affect as emotion. To add stability to this endeavour, I have adopted the cultural
mediation framework forwarded by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012). In doing so, three
further sub-questions are addressed.

The first of which is; how does cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect help frame the
consumption experience? This question necessitates greater understanding of cultural
intermediaries’ embodied labour forms that circulate affective energies and induce change in
affected bodies. The fluid modulation of affective flow demands a specialised expertise. In this
respect, a second sub-question is; how do cultural intermediaries develop the expertise for the
mobilisation of affect? Cultural intermediaries’ expertise is constitutive of cultural capital
which facilitates a ‘natural’ performance and intermediaries’ endowment with a mark of
distinction (Bourdieu 1984). The cultural legitimacy conferred upon intermediaries affirms
their belonging to a model life and perpetuates their ineffable affective capacity. A final
question addressed by this research is; can we identify the impact made by the mobilisation of
affect? I have noted how the notion of impact demands greater empirical investigation in order
to articulate its potency. However, we do know based on extant theoretical contributions (Hill
et al. 2014; Thrift 2008; 2010; Blackman 2008; Brennan 2004), that the circulation of affective
intensities triggers bodies’ affective resonances (Elliott 1998). In doing so, these energies
pierce the porous boundaries of bodies and shape their enduring dispositions. In offering a fully
articulated theoretical and empirical address of these questions, the remaining chapters of this
thesis read as follows.
Chapter Two expands further on the ideas presented by the preceding chapter. Specifically, I will add further clarity to consumer research understanding of affect. In doing so, I conceptualise the field of high fashion as an ‘affective economy’ (Ahmed 2004). This is an economy in which the non-representational aspects of consumption, such as the flow of affective intensities are valued for their capacity to capture attention and induce favourable affective states in bodies. I will also shed further light on the theoretical framework outlined by Smith-Matthews and Maguire (2012). I augment the framework with extant theoretical contributions from fashion literature (e.g. Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2002; 2009 Mears and Finlay 2005; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Soley-Beltran 2006; Mears 2008; 2009) and also with the helpful theoretical concepts of habitus and the corporeal schema (Bourdieu 1984; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Finally, I filter my study of cultural intermediaries by focusing specifically on fashion models. I borrow from Parmentier and Fischer (2007) in identifying the cultural commodity of high fashion as ‘the model life’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007). I adopt (and expand) this term in order to conceptualise the imaginative reality into which affected bodies are absorbed. That is, the model life refers to the aspirational world to which individuals (fashion consumers) are admonished to aspire.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach of this research. In order to understand and capture the non-rational, felt intensities that influence consumption, we need not resort to elaborate neuro-marketing techniques. Instead, to understand intermediaries’ cultural impact, I engage in personal introspection (Hill et al. 2014) while also adopting a method that traces intermediaries’ assemblage of consumption and production processes as they shape dispositions and mediate taste. As an interpretivist, to answer the research questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter, I have chosen to embrace narrative inquiry. Narrative is a fundamental way by which individuals’ make sense of and negotiate their subjective realities (Shankar et al. 2001). It is also a useful way to capture emic descriptions of the felt intensities that shape perception from the perspective of the affecting and affected body (Hill et al. 2014). Its ontological status offers a fruitful method to understand the relation between affect and mediation. Narrative is also useful to understand the processes by which cultural intermediaries’ accrue the cultural capital necessary to authenticate a fabricated reality. To analyse my narrative data, I have chosen to oscillate between a holistic-content and categorical-content approach as outlined by Lieblich et al. (1998). In doing so, I create a polyphonic text that provides a more insightful understanding of what cultural intermediaries do than previously existed.
Chapter Four is the first of two data chapters. In this chapter, my participants reflect on their rare cultural capital as they speak of the otherness and distinction embodied by the high fashion ‘look’. The chapter conceptualises high fashion as a field of competition for cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985). Models’ legitimation within the field affirms their belonging to the distinct world of the model life (Parmentier and Fischer 2007). However, the basis upon which legitimation occurs is shrouded in mystery as the look embodies a rarefied and coded magic that only those with the requisite cultural capital can decipher. In legitimating fashion models, tastemakers to whom I also spoke, diffuse a belief in the ‘miraculous’ transubstantiation of models and their elevation to a higher reality (Bourdieu 1985). In doing so, the look is conferred with a coveted rarity for its unique capacity to invoke intensified emotion in those who encounter it. The affective capacity of its esoteric appeal frames the consumption experience and compels tastemakers’ belief in fashion models as descendants of an ethereal lineage from this world.

Chapter Five sheds further light on fashion models’ expertise and the embodied performances that mobilise affect to impact those in relation. To do this, I have broken this chapter into two parts. That is, I have chosen to explore two different consumption experiences of the model life; the first half analyses the creation and impact of affective imagery while the second half deconstructs the affect-laden narrative of a fashion show. In doing so, I present narrative data that in different ways, illustrates how the mobilisation of affect frames the consumption experience of the model life through animating a narrative of deification that impacts bodies in relation. I identify the unique affecting presence of the fashion model as that which has been developed from past epiphanic experiences (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Embracing the theoretical contributions of Bourdieu (1984) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), I observe how the affective intensity of these experiences remains pinned to models’ bodies and thus constitute their ‘fashion habitus’ (Entwistle 2009). Intermediaries’ rarefied stock of capital, particularly cultural capital facilitates their reflection on these affective states and their fluid reinvigoration to mobilise affect when working with imaging technologies at a fashion show or photo shoot for example. Through a combination of introspection and narrative interviews, I also explore the impact made on bodies in relation having experienced the affecting presence of the model.

11Designers, photographers, bookers, talent scouts etc.
12In this research, as noted at the beginning, ‘bodies in relation’ refers to tastemakers within high fashion to whom I also spoke. These are defined as culturally legitimised actors with rare stocks of capital (namely cultural, emotional, social, symbolic, embodied) and subsequent capacity to recognise ‘special’ qualities in others. They are also referred to interchangeably in this research as ‘gatekeepers’.
I identify the impact as ‘enchantment’, whereupon bodies’ rational defences break down and project an aura of reverie onto the fashion model. In doing so, bodies imaginatively inhabit the sublime reality of the affecting presence that has shaped their aesthetic sensibilities.

Chapter Six constitutes a discussion wherein I present two core contributions and also a potential contribution based on the findings of my research. I begin by addressing my main research question that addresses how cultural intermediaries mobilise affect. I interpret from my narrative inquiry that the circulation of affect is a process. As such, I answer this question by filtering my findings through the cultural mediation framework (Smith-Matthews and Maguire 2012). Succinctly, cultural intermediaries mobilise affect by acting as conduits for the flow of contagious energies that pervade the atmosphere\(^\text{13}\). They expertly allow their bodies to become affected and consequently, their past affective states to be triggered, reinvigorated and mobilised. In doing so, they evoke an affecting presence which is then captured and diffused among a social context.

A further contribution concerns how we understand the model life. As a cultural commodity, the model life represents an extremely competitive, symbolic consumption space to which access is granted based on rarefied cultural capital (Parmentier and Fischer 2007). However, the non-representational approach applied by this research allows for greater expansion on the concept. For instance, my empirical findings adopt various artistic, but also religious terminologies used to articulate the consumption experience of the model life. I interpret the use of such phrases due to the ineffable intensities evoked that enchant the imagination and evade cognitive capture or logical articulation. In this respect, cultural intermediaries of high fashion are bestowed the power of transubstantiation (Bourdieu 1984). Based on an emic understanding from my empirical data, I further extend the concept by applying the etic framework suggested by Belk et al. (1989). That is, I conceptualise the model life as a transcendent experience into which affected bodies become ab sorbed. The intensities felt during consumption are considered as ‘spiritual’ due to their inability to capture cognitively. As cultural intermediaries of high fashion, consecrated models mediate narratives of sacredness to obscure potential experience of the profane qualities that exist beneath this sacred veil.

\textsuperscript{13} Importantly, affective triggers are not confined to strict human interactions between two physical bodies. An affective relation can also be created through the ‘psychological, emotional and physical connections a body has: with other people (lovers, friends, colleagues, fellow commuters); abstract ideas (literature, film, music); activities (such as through body work practices of jogging, weights training, aerobics, or walking) and social constructs (including gender, race, class, and dominant discourses of health) (Coffey 2012: 41).
This research began by identifying the need to empirically examine cultural intermediaries based on some exclusions made by McCracken (1986) when discussing the meaning transfer model. I frame this discussion as a ‘potential contribution’ because it necessitates augmentation from consumer narratives in order to merit a significant contribution to consumer research. However, within this discussion I present a coherent argument for reconsidering the work of cultural intermediaries and a subsequent reconsideration of their role in meaning transfer. For instance, extant literature (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006) has suggested that the creation and transfer of meaning is a consumer-based endeavour. My research supports this assumption and argues that the role of cultural intermediaries is not to transfer meaning, but rather, to contaminate with affect. That is, their precognitive circulation of affective energies contaminates bodies in relation that then translates into preconceived categories of emotion and meaning. In other words, the consumer ascribes meaning to the consumption experience upon having their attention captured and deep affective resonances triggered by cultural intermediaries’ modulation of affective flow.

Chapter Seven concludes this research by reiterating the key research questions posed by this study followed by a brief outline of the constituents of each chapter. Having done so, I delineate the key contributions made by this research and situate them within the domain of CCT. Finally, I make suggestions for future research.
2. Cultural Mediation in the Late Capitalist Era

‘And round their master, in various forms of disguise, are lying the empty dreams, made to resemble different shapes as many to count as the leaves in the forest, the ears in a harvest field or the grains of sand on the seashore’

Ovid XI: 452.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an expansion on the main ideas outlined in chapter one. Specifically, I will provide further articulation to my research questions by firstly positioning cultural mediation as a contemporary endeavour. That is, the shift to prioritise the affective aspects of consumption has placed greater importance on cultural intermediaries for their capacity to diffuse cultural values, ideas and beliefs. Secondly, I expand on the concept of affect by conceptualising the field of high fashion as an affective economy; one in which emotions are commodified and value generated through the provocation of an affective response from bodies in relation (Ahmed 2004).

Thirdly, I summarise discussions of cultural intermediaries based on extant literature before specifically choosing fashion models as a group for further study. I have chosen models due to their cultural impact in shaping aesthetic taste that, to my mind, has not been sufficiently recognised by consumer research. The majority of attention paid to fashion models has been from a representational perspective (Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2002; 2009 Mears and Finlay 2005; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Soley-Beltran 2006; Mears 2008; 2009) and thus, produced conclusions that have diminished their cultural significance and affective capacity. Yet as cultural intermediaries, further attention must be granted to how their mobilisation of affect animates representations of ‘the model life’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011) and creates an emotional tie between bodies and this reality.

Finally, the processes through which this occurs are articulated through a cultural mediation framework (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012). As stated in Chapter One, the infancy of the framework necessitates further augmentation specifically through the application of Pierre
Bourdieu (1984; 1985; 1990; 1996; 1998) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). I also acknowledge discussions of cultural labour performed by fashion models as outlined by extant literature (Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2002; 2009 Mears and Finlay 2005; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Soley-Beltran 2006; Mears 2008; 2009). Having delineated these four main areas within the chapter, my research will have created a fruitful platform upon which to launch a methodological study and make significant contributions to our understanding of cultural intermediaries of high fashion.

2.2 A Late Capitalist Era of Consumption

High fashion as a context complements the work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) whose seminal paper(s) positions contemporary consumption as an act directed toward the experience of fantasy. The authors adopt an ‘experiential view’ which regards consumption as a ‘primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses and aesthetic criteria’ (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982: 132). This shift in value from functional to symbolic value has been documented by many insightful pieces of work (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; McCracken 1986; 1989; Belk 1988; Elliott 1997; 1998; Ritson and Elliott 1999; Kozinets 2001; Holt 1998; 2002; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; 2008; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Atik and Firat 2013; Joy et al. 2014). Research in this vein has also to a great extent tracked cultural developments in its coverage of the progression that has taken place from traditional to hedonic consumption (e.g. Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Richins and Dawson 1992; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002; Murray 2002; Belk et al. 2003; Joy and Sherry 2003; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2010; 2013; Dion and Arnould 2011).

Consumers’ orientation has consequently changed from that of an information processor to a communicator (Gabriel and Lang 2006). The contemporary consumer now desires recognition (Crossley 2001) rather than satisfaction from material accumulation. The omnipresence of stimuli that trigger these resonances has resulted in desire becoming conceptualised as a fervent, embodied passion (Campbell 1987; Joy and Sherry 2003; Belk et al. 2003) that disobeys rationale in favour of the symbolic, aesthetic and multi-sensory aspects of the consumption experience. As noted by Venkatesh and Meamber (2008:51); ‘an individual may rationalise his or her particular modes of experience later, but the experience itself is not rational in origin or content’. In other words, individuals have become non-rational ‘consumers
of illusions’ (Debord 1977) that consume ‘images not things’ (Taylor and Saarinen 1994). In the era of late capitalism, they can no longer be conceptualised as passive dupes, but instead, interpretive agents or pleasure seekers who construct meaning in a way that fits their chosen identities (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Brands also began to adopt a new cultural relevance after this shift. Brands are now considered ‘authentic cultural resources’ (Holt 2002: 70) with which consumers construct a pastiche of the culturally legitimated identities to which they have been exposed in the media (Elliott 1997). While they do not belong to anyone in particular (Mears 2011), brands exist as ‘bundles of meaning’ (Levy 1959) across a social consumption space. For Arvidsson (2005), brands do not refer to the product but rather, connote a specific style of consumption and act as capital to be employed in the production of a social and affective connection. This has also been described as ‘surplus value’ (Lazzarato 1996; Arvidsson 2005). This value pertains to a shared meaning, social relation or emotional attachment felt to a brand or consumption experience that did not exist before (Arvidsson 2005).

I posit cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect as critical to the production of surplus value in that it triggers emotions already stored within the consumer that orient his/her behaviour in a certain way (Schwartz 1976). As Jerry Goodis explains, ‘advertising doesn’t always mirror how people are acting, but how they’re dreaming…In a sense, what we’re doing is wrapping up your emotions and selling them back to you’ (In Nelson 1983: 10). The viewer thus becomes absorbed into an imagined depiction of reality (Singer 1966; Swanson 1978) through embodied consumption (Sherry 1998; Peñaloza 1998; Sherry et al. 2001; Goulding 2002; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014) that takes place just below her/his cognitive awareness (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

Consumption in contemporary culture is therefore based ‘not on what consumers know to be real, but rather on what they desire reality to be’ (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982: 94). To this end, production is based on the creation and legitimation of these realities as authentic. The emotions triggered by intermediaries’ embodiment of affective stimuli enhance the impact and subsequent connection felt toward the consumption experience. Thus, at the epicentre of this contemporary process lies ‘affect’; the ineffable stimulus embodied and mobilised by cultural intermediaries with such intensity, that it blurs the distinction between dreams and reality.
2.3 The Economy of Affect

I noted in Chapter One that the concept of affect forwarded here aligns with the nature of consumption experiences described by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Joy and Sherry (2003), Dion and Arnould (2011) etc. Due to its capacity to link bodies, affect has been described as ‘the most basic form of communication that stands as the basis of the construction of a common social world’ (Arvidsson 2005:190). As such, affect merges both the corporeal and intellectual dispositions of the body (Wissinger 2007a) and forms the primary component that constitutes a shared relation or connection between bodies.

Further to this point, Berger (1972) argues that the way we see things is affected by what we believe to be authentic. Yet we can only see and therefore, believe that which hails our attention (Goldman and Papson 1996). Technological advances and increased competition amongst brands have made attention a scarce commodity in late capitalist culture. It follows that if attention is scarce; the capacity of consumption experiences to command attention generates value. The necessity of such in creating economic value has led to the formulation of an ‘attention economy’ (Davenport and Beck 2001; Humphreys and Kozinets 2009). Within this context, value is created through the interaction of affect and material exchange (Humphreys and Kozinets 2009).

As ‘there is no perception without affection’ (Bergson 1990: 60), the consumption experience must invoke a connection with individuals through the provocation of an affective response. Thus, from a cultural mediation perspective, ‘in an economy in which control of attention has value, the control of affective flow has value as well’ (Wissinger 2007a: 235). Greater attention on the capacity of the body to affect and be affected (Massumi 2002) has led to the conception of ‘the affective turn’ (Clough and Halley 2007). This places increased focus on the dynamism of the body, positioning it as a site of energy flows and intensity (Wissinger 2007a). The affective turn explores how the body is used to circulate energies during the production of experiences that capture attention and alter peoples’ embodied dispositions. Embracing the affective turn has the capacity to extend our understanding of consumer behaviour by adding ‘colour, tone and texture to the lived body’ (Grossberg 1992: 81). A continued turn to affect in consumer research (Elliott 1998) will foreground peoples’ qualitative and embodied experiences of consumption while adding a new dimension to how we understand the resonance of consumption experiences.
Furthermore, as Elliott (1998: 97) notes, ‘hidden behind every emotion is a more or less enduring disposition to prefer certain states in the world’. In an affective economy, the capacity of cultural intermediaries to impact bodies and foster a more imaginative, dreamlike state (Elliott 1998) is mined for value. Capital investment in intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect has resulted in the realisation of profit (Ahmed 2004). This had led to a new formulation known as ‘the affective economy’ (Ahmed 2004).

An extension of an ‘attention economy’, the ‘affective economy’ (Ahmed 2004) arose due to the increasing dominance of the service sector in post-industrial capitalist society, as ‘enlivening, capacitating, and modulating affect’ (Wissinger 2007 a: 238) became core processes through which value was produced. In other words, this is an economy where emotions are commodified and affect, rather than financial capital is economised (Bjerg and Staunaes 2011). The distinguishing features of such an economy are practised (perhaps unknowingly) by members of mainstream society due to the subsumption of reproductive labour by capital (Wissinger 2007a). By this, Wissinger (2007a) refers to the increasing tendency of Western culture to view productive activities that were once private, such as cooking, socialising, and health care, as sites of capital investment. Brands generate ‘surplus value’ (Arvidsson 2005) in an affective economy when they invest in the affective capacity of these consumption and production processes. In doing so, the imaginative consumption experience that resonates with audiences through mediation becomes branded and adheres to a particular lifestyle and pattern of consumption. Thus, given their impact, there remains a significant degree of scholarly interest due to the labour of cultural intermediaries.

2.4 Merchants of Mystique

When exploring cultural mediation, most scholars begin with Bourdieu (1993; 1984), who describes intermediaries as those involved in the production of symbolic goods and services; ‘occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services. These include the various jobs in medical and social assistance…and in cultural production and organisation’ (Bourdieu 1984: 359). However, as evident from this description, his list is sprawling and includes those in cultural industries such as television, journalism and

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14 Of course, depending on the nature of the affective response, this may or may not translate into emotion. Similarly, the emotion need not always be positive in the form of desire for example but can also be negative such as fear, love, disgust etc. (Ahmed 2004).
radio…groups in marketing, advertising as well as medical and social assistance sectors all within this umbrella term.

The over inclusive description is troublesome as it dilutes our understanding of the cultural impact made by arbiters of taste (Hesmondhalgh 2006; Molloy and Larner, 2010). For instance, Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012: 552) argue that ‘cultural intermediaries’ is ‘an overly-inclusive, analytically-neutered term: a conceptual muddle that fails to assist in unpacking the division of labour involved in the construction of cultural goods’. Indeed, the sole representational approach adopted by CCT to understanding cultural intermediaries has produced a limited understanding of cultural intermediaries as ‘sorcerers’ and ‘merchants of mystique’ (Belk et al. 2003) who enchant consumers’ imaginations from within ‘magical systems of promotion’ (Williams 1980) and ‘dream-worlds of display’ (Williams 1982). Yet the language used to describe the impact of cultural intermediaries offers interesting insight into their ineffable influence on consumer behaviour and current representations of their identity.

As noted in Chapter One while paraphrasing Hill et al. (2014), a non-representational approach to exploration does not seek to transplant or negate any contributions made by representational studies. On the contrary, it seeks to bolster these findings and produce a more balanced, cohesive conceptualisation of a context of study. To adequately capture cultural intermediaries’ influence on the aesthetic consumption experience, it is both helpful and necessary to acknowledge coverage (specifically within CCT) that has come from a representational perspective. Of these, McCracken’s (1986) meaning transfer model remains at the core of this discussion.

In this seminal paper, McCracken (1986) argues that in a consumer society, meaning initially resides in the culturally constituted world. He describes this as ‘the world of everyday experience in which the phenomenal world presents itself to the individual’s senses, fully shaped and constituted by the beliefs and assumptions of her/his culture’ (McCracken 1986: 72). From here, meaning is transferred to consumer goods through instrumental cultural belief systems of advertising and fashion. The author notes that for meaning transfer to take place, the advertisement must establish ‘symbolic equivalence’ (McCracken 1986: 74) between the consumer good and the culturally constituted world. If the world and good enjoy ‘special harmony’ (McCracken 1986: 75), the viewer will attribute to the product, certain qualities that
(s)he recognises from the culturally constituted world and meaning transfer is complete (McCracken 1986).

Relative to this research, McCracken (1986) identifies the fashion system as a central conduit through which meaningful images are created and circulated. The author acknowledges fashion as a more complicated system than that of advertising due to the greater sources of meaning, agents of transfer\textsuperscript{15} and forms of media involved in the communication of meaning. Given this complexity, McCracken (1986) delineates three different capacities by which fashion transfers meaning.

The first of which refers to fashion’s association of new styles with established and recognisable cultural elements. Through juxtaposition, meaning is transferred as the consumer interprets a relationship between the good and cultural world. Secondly, fashion establishes meaning by associating consumer goods with culturally significant individuals or opinion leaders (McCracken 1986). Due to their social status, cultural agents such as celebrities have the capacity to shape and reform existing meaning. Finally, fashion possesses the capacity to radically reform cultural meaning by appropriating the styles of those on the periphery of fashion culture such as hippies, bikers, drug addicts etc. When filtered through the fashion system, these subcultural meanings are commodified and legitimised as fashionable\textsuperscript{16}. Based on these conceptualisations, we begin to further appreciate the influence of cultural intermediaries as those who define transitory collections of meaning (i.e. trends) as fashionable.

Of these arbiters, McCracken (1986) identifies product designers and fashion journalists as the most influential. Designers are described as ‘very conspicuous individuals who establish themselves as arbiters of clothing design in fashion centres such as Paris or Milan, and who surround themselves with a cult of personality’ (McCracken 1986:77). Personality is crucial to suffusing the physical properties of the garment with symbolic qualities as the strength and appeal of designers’ personalities bestow upon the brand, human and emotional characteristics if meaning transfer has successfully taken place. For McCracken (1986), fashion journalists act as ‘gatekeepers’ of this world as they review aesthetic, social and cultural innovations before

\textsuperscript{15} Rather than use the term ‘cultural intermediaries’, McCracken (1986) prioritises ‘agents of transfer’.

\textsuperscript{16} An example of this is ‘heroin chic’ embodied by Kate Moss. A look popularised in the late 1990s, ‘heroin chic’ was characterised by a thin, waif-like appearance, pale skin and dark circles under the eyes. At the time, it was positioned as a youthful revolt against the traditional and ‘perfect’ depictions of femininity embodied by cultural figures such as Cindy Crawford, Claudia Schiffer and Christy Turlington.
disseminating conceptions of ‘in fashion’ to an audience. They utilise their ‘incipient taste’\textsuperscript{17} (Blumer 1969: 280) to make projections of future trends and tastes known to designers who then infuse inspired collections with personality, making it ‘something more’. Further to this, journalists legitimate the cultural significance of the new collection as ‘in fashion’, ensuring it is viewed in the ‘right’ places by fellow influential tastemakers.

McCracken’s (1986) brief overview of agents’ of transfer dissemination of taste does enough to illustrate the extreme importance of cultural intermediaries. From the model, I interpret the brand, producer and consumer as critically interlinked in the production of symbolic meaning. Yet the specific part played by each is still somewhat mystified. For instance, the degree to which the consumer recognises symbolic value as significant and co-creates meaning is dependent on the preceding resonance of the affective connection felt to the consumption experience. I interpret this as an act that is largely confined to the cultural intermediary. Furthermore, an exploration of this underlying affective connection would be better illuminated by acknowledging the non-representational influence (i.e. affective intensities) and thus, the subsequent processes involved in mediating this influence.

While not alone in this endeavour, the mystification that endows current conceptualisations has led further scholars (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; Nixon and Du Gay 2002; Entwistle 2009; Negus 2002) to urge for greater empirical examination of consumption and production processes; ‘the actual processes of mediation have tended to be overlooked in favour of analysis of the cultural identities of the mediators themselves’ (Entwistle 2006: 707). For example, Venkatesh and Meamber (2006) observe that in field of cultural production, cultural intermediaries’ consumption and production processes commodify the meaningful signs and aesthetic symbols that constitute the consumption experience. Thus, while the identity of these cultural arbiters is important, it is but ‘only one element in the complex mix’ of mediation (Cronin 2004:351). To progress, as Appadurai (1986:5) argues, ‘we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed by their forms, their uses, their trajectories’.

This research adopts the more succinct and appropriate conceptualisation of cultural intermediaries’ significance, as a rarefied group that ‘impact upon notions of what and thereby who, is legitimate, desirable and worthy, and thus by definition what and who is not. This is

\textsuperscript{17} The outcome of a shared history among fashion insiders wherein they ‘become orientated towards an imagined ‘future’ that becomes a reality by their own activities of selecting over fashion week collections’ (Entwistle 2009: 137).
why cultural intermediaries matter’ (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012: 552). Based on this newly specified description, research can begin to balance the representational conceptualisation of cultural intermediaries with a non-representational approach that foregrounds the processes by which impact is made.

A non-representational approach to cultural mediation foregrounds the productive capacity of consumption. That is, every act of consumption is also an act of production (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Consumption in this sense refers to intermediaries’ aesthetically stylised way of consuming (Holt 1998) which resultantly produces, or circulates affect. Thus, rather than focus on cultural intermediaries as specific occupations or identities (Bourdieu 1993; 1984; McCracken 1986), we must contextualise their mystique ‘as a function of the multiplicity of activities and relationships organised around the new economic spaces of the fashion industry, all of which are subject to the exigencies of capital accumulation’ (Molloy and Larner 2010:362). I argue that an exploration of cultural intermediaries based on cultural capital is central to the mediation of taste (Holt 1998) and will facilitate a much better understanding of the processes involved in forging an affective connection. Of the various cultural intermediaries within the fashion system, I have specifically chosen to explore fashion models.

Within this context, I have chosen to focus on male fashion models. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, where fashion modelling is concerned, there has been a wealth of attention paid to female modelling and the glamour that surrounds the industry at the expense of their male counterparts. Male modelling, in particular, did not begin to expand until the emergence of the new man in the 1980s, when men were encouraged to cultivate and increase their degree of embodied capital through consumption. The emergence of male modelling thus coincided with the expansion of the male grooming market (Nixon 1996) and heralded a new era of consumer goods for which men were the prime targets. The male gaze was turned inward (Patterson and Elliot 2002) and aesthetic appreciation and display of the male body became part of mainstream consumer culture. Thus, from this perspective, far greater attention should be levied toward male cultural intermediaries and their productive capacity.

Secondly, I felt that as a male interpretive researcher, to focus on male models would elicit a new and fresh perspective on the aesthetic consumption experience. Particularly where future publications are concerned, the methodology chosen fits well with this choice and helps frame the aesthetic consumption experience through a different lens, thereby potentially providing previously unacknowledged insights and allowing for comparative work in the future.
Fashion modelling as a cultural phenomenon is inextricably linked to the rapid development of consumer culture (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006). Further shifts in our understanding of brands from bundles of attributes to bundles of meaning (Levy 1959) and concomitant shifts in the nature of competition from that based on the physical properties of products to the realm of image and aesthetics saw models take on an important role as progenitors of consumer desire. Based on the literature’s scant coverage of fashion models, we can say with certainty that from an overall perspective, their job is to effectively portray a future self to the consumer and become by definition, the personification of her/his dream (Venkatesh et al. 2010).

Fashion models represent an interesting group both theoretically and empirically as the majority of what has been limited attention attributed to their profession has been negative. Rather than celebrities who command obvious significant influence in shaping cultural taste, fashion models have been theoretically relegated to the status of ‘cardboard-cut-out’ (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006) and deemed to lack any cultural impact aside from negative idealised depictions of beauty (Bordo 1993). This is a misinformed stance that potentially derives from a lack of attention to their role as cultural intermediaries. As cultural mediation is subject to the exigencies of capital (Molloy and Larner 2010), I foreground fashion models as a group that command rare cultural and emotional capital, which facilitates their unique capacity to reflect on and mobilise affect.

To introduce their significance, I follow the description forwarded by Elspeth Brown (2012: 37), who credits fashion models with the capacity to ‘transform subjective aspects of modern selfhood gesture, appearance, presence into immaterial commodities, adding surplus value to manufactured goods that are then purchased by wholesale buyers or retail consumers…Models sell commodities by using their bodies to produce commercialised affect in relationship to specific goods: glamour, elegance, cool. The vehicle through which these elusive promises are made is the model’s performance of a new form of sexuality, one specific to the emerging mass culture industries of the early twentieth century’. Their affective capacity remains tied to their cultural influence as it facilitates their capacity to animate ‘a compelling story without words, using embodied expression, much as in silent motion pictures or ballet’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2013: 382). As intermediaries, their effortless dissemination of the values and beliefs that constitute ‘in fashion’ produce a captivating image ‘of a lifestyle that is then packaged and sold in the form of television shows, websites, ringtones and other branded products that consumers
use to create a sense of community around the idea of fashion, in a form of pre-programmed agency that is profitable for marketers’ (Wissinger 2009:284).

In recent years, the various social platforms from which fashionable imagery can be siege consumers have expanded rapidly. The secrecy that once shrouded the modelling industry has been somewhat sacrificed as ideologies and subsequent means of creating value have begun to shift. Yet rather than its rarity being destroyed, high fashion has merely re-appropriated it to suit commercialist aims. In contemporary culture, the intensity with which high fashion ideologies are commodified has endowed the field with greater emotional significance and the capacity to infiltrate the dreams of fashion audiences.

For example, the last decade has witnessed a slew of television shows such as *The Agency*, *Make Me a Supermodel*, *America’s Next Top Model*, *Britain & Ireland’s Next Top Model*, *The Janice Dickinson Modelling Agency*, *Project Runway*, *America’s Smartest Model*, *A Model Life*, and *The Face*. All capitalise on the seductive air of mystique, rarity and romanticism that has been woven around high fashion ideologies. Such is its appeal that the *Top Model* franchise is now shown in 44 countries (Banks 2007). Each show also has an online social media presence that consumers can access at any time. Cultural mediation of the values and beliefs that constitute these television shows shape individuals’ perceptions of reality and subsequent consumer behaviour. When consumed, individuals do not just engage with a television show, but rather, experience a branded lifestyle.

While from an outsider perspective, these media representations might appear superficial or frivolous; they offer important insight into how we might understand the immaterial aspects of cultural mediation. For instance, the premise of these television shows is a modelling competition wherein both men and women (depending on the show) vie for the chance to become a ‘top model’ and signed to a prestigious modelling agency. Each week, competitors are put through a series of fashion related challenges during which they must showcase their skills as a model. With the glamorous, branded lifestyle of high fashion as a backdrop, these challenges may constitute posing for a particular campaign, walking the runway in a designer’s new creation, or exhibiting personality while interacting with the media. Although rarely acknowledged, the model is being judged on her/his affective capacity to command the recognition of the viewer, make an emotional connection and subsequently, legitimate the high fashion lifestyle as desirable.
Challenges that are passed successfully ensure entry to the next round and also confer aspiring models with greater cultural capital. Conversely, failure to pass the challenge illuminates models’ flaws and a subsequent disconnect with the ethereal world of high fashion. As such, they are eliminated. This process continues until one model remains. The ‘winner’ is (s)he who has passed all challenges and garnered a distinguishing wealth of cultural capital that allows her/him to fluidly mobilise affect. Greater cultural capital confers significant authenticity upon the model and endows her/him with the capacity to become a cultural arbiter of taste (Jones 2013).

While I agree with the point made by Jones (2013) in theory, the reality is that the winners of these television shows rarely become established at the elite level (Entwistle and Wissinger 2012). One explanation is, this is television. Its main priority is not to find ‘the next top model’. Rather, its obligation to provide ‘entertainment’ (confrontational personalities, instigated situations etc.) supersedes a genuine attempt to identify a model that could become a cultural intermediary. Yet while these models arguably never amass the affective capacity of Kate Moss for instance, the processes to which they are subjected offer an alternate way of reading the body of a cultural intermediary. We begin to appreciate fashion models as labouring bodies that strive to augment their affective capacity through the acquisition of cultural capital. Furthermore, they are illustrative of the shift to foreground desire for recognition and vicarious/imaginative consumption experiences. That is, the profit and appeal of such shows derive from animating an enchanting consumption experience that makes a connection with viewers and stokes their aspiration to this life, conceptualised here as the model life (Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011).

2.4.2 The Model Life

The model life as a concept is very much in its infancy, with the majority of work on its articulation provided by Parmentier and Fischer (2007), while some brief supplementary references are also offered by Parmentier and Fischer (2011) and Wissinger (2009). The model life is defined as ‘becoming a member of a small, elite group [of models] whose bodies and personae are intensely sought after for their aesthetic singularity, and who reap culturally celebrated rewards such as money, luxurious goods, and celebrity status’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007: 24). As it pertains to high fashion, a field predicated on capital accumulation, the model life can be further conceptualised as a ‘commodity that is in scarce supply, and to which access is restricted by powerful agents’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007: 23).
Within this market of limited supply, individuals compete for the opportunity to consume the coveted model life through appropriating various modes of agency as outlined by Parmentier and Fischer (2007) and also by research in Chapter Four. These modes of agency mainly refer to the obligation to adhere to the artistic rather than capitalist ideologies of high fashion. A power dynamic thus exists between those who strive to consume this life and the gatekeepers who exert control over entry. Similar to my discussion of cultural intermediaries, Parmentier and Fischer (2007) observe that the barriers to entry in this case are negotiated based on economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990). This distinct lifestyle is best characterised as one to which ‘many are called, few are chosen, and even fewer end up consuming the model life they initially desired’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007: 25).

Given these characteristics, I posit that the field of high fashion mirrors a field of restricted production (FRP) (Bourdieu 1985). Consequently, the model life is a rarefied, aesthetic consumption experience. Importantly, in this type of field economic profit is secondary to the accumulation of symbolic value (Bourdieu 1985). As a cultural belief system within a FRP, high fashion fosters socially valorised and affective attachments to the model life through culturally recognised and revered processes of production and consumption. As Bourdieu (1985: 13) observes, these processes are ‘dominated by agents and institutions of consecration…Members of these institutions are authorised (or rather compete for authority) to endow works with certain properties and thus to rank them on a scale of legitimacy.’ Fashion models’ unique processes that mobilise affect captivate audiences, thus ensuring their consecration and subsequent legitimacy while reproducing a careful selection of ‘in fashion’ consumers with sufficient cultural capital to interpret and (imaginatively) consume these avant-garde experiences (Bourdieu 1985). The autonomy enjoyed by high fashion is dependent on cultural intermediaries’ capacity to animate aesthetic experiences that are veiled in a coded rarity.

Before the introduction of the model life, the main conceptualisation of the desirable end state to which individuals aspire has been labelled ‘the good life’ (Belk and Pollay 1985). This represents a change in social values from spiritual rewards to hedonistic pleasures. As the authors note, the good life was conceived through a shift in the prioritisations of advertising. The idealised imagery that adorned billboards, magazines and television screens left many consumers to speculate as to why their lives did not mirror this good life rather than question
the authenticity of the imagery (Williams 1981). The result was a cultural turn to material consumption in an attempt to bridge this perceived lifestyle gap.

The good life is also a concept driven by Belk’s (1985) definition of materialism; ‘the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person’s life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction’. As Campbell (1987) would argue, the good life represents ‘traditional hedonism’. It foregrounds the quantitative accumulation of material possessions as a tonic with which to ameliorate the sense of discontent induced by idealised imagery in advertising. Further research (Rochberg-Halton 1986; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1978; 1981; Richins and Dawson (1992) has sought to extend Belk’s (1985) conceptualisation of materialism. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1978) introduce the concept of ‘terminal’ and ‘instrumental’ materialism by which we might further understand this consumption process as it pertains to the realisation of an aspirational future.

‘Terminal’ materialism deems consumption to be an end in itself and yields a consumption mentality wherein we ‘reduce our ultimate goals to the possession of things’ (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1978: 8). Alternatively, ‘instrumental’ materialism refers to the way in which goods ‘act as essential means for discovering and furthering personal values and goals in life’ (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1978:8). However, as Richins and Dawson (1992) argue, there are inconsistencies between these terms as both use material goods as a platform to provoke envy and admiration from others. That is, they are instrumental. Also, these concepts portray a desired end state (admiration, envy etc.) as attainable based on material consumption. Yet research on desire has illustrated that it can never be quelled (Campbell 1987; Belk et al. 2003) and only ever ‘satisfied’ through imagination and fantasy. Furthermore, the good life still exhibits an over-reliance on the material product and a consequent negation of the imaginative aspects of consumption.

In an affective economy, the model life, as a conceptualisation of an aspirational, branded lifestyle, must acknowledge the immaterial, symbolic and hedonistic aspects of consumption (e.g. Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; McCracken 1986; Belk 1988; Elliott 1997; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Ritson and Elliott 1999; Kozinets 2001; Goulding 2002; Holt 2002; Murray 2002; Joy and Sherry 2003; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Atik and Firat 2013). Campbell (1987) has described this neo-wave of
consumption as ‘imaginative hedonism’ wherein value is derived from emotionally pleasurable experiences elicited in fantasy. Here, the consumer is conceptualised as a ‘dream artist’ who reacts subjectively to having her/his affective resonances triggered and subsequently negotiates experiential fantasies as though they were real (Campbell 1987).

The value that constitutes ‘imaginative hedonism’ is aesthetic. That is, it is detached, disinterested and distanced from concerns of practicality and rationality (Wagner 1999). The aesthetic experience of ‘imaginative hedonism’ possesses affective attributes that affirm a person’s belief in the capacities of the consumption experience as belonging to a transcendent reality. I argue that this belief is concretised through cultural intermediaries’ creation of an affective connection. The intense impact of the aesthetic experience provokes consumers’ desires for recognition (Crossley 2001) by animating a fantasy structure wherein these desires can be imaginatively fulfilled. The resonance created by the experience shapes consumers’ motives, tastes and perception of reality. Upon doing so, the affective intensities felt during consumption constitute consumers’ emotional capital. When triggered, the ‘unwelcome intrusion of reality’ (Campbell 1987) is temporarily evaded and the model life consumed through imagination. To illustrate the processes through which cultural intermediaries forge an emotional tie to animated representations of the model life, I adopt the framework outlined by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012).

2.5 A Framework for Cultural Mediation

This framework was arranged by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012) with the specific purpose of illustrating what cultural intermediaries actually do. The three dimensions they propose are ‘framing’, ‘expertise’ and ‘impact’.

2.5.1 Framing

The authors describe ‘framing’ as a process by which cultural intermediaries infuse experiences, brands, images, consumption styles etc. with symbolic value. In doing so, they authenticate these signs as ‘legitimate and worthy points of attachment for intended receivers’ (Smith Matthews and Maguire 2012: 554). Having been ‘framed’, I argue the consumption experience is made desirable and represents an authentic resource with which individuals can acquire emotional and hedonic fulfilment. This concept extends intermediaries’ role far beyond that of merely selling goods. During framing, intermediaries ‘promote a host of things:
aesthetic standards of dress, body, and demeanour, a particular lifestyle, particular patterns of consumption (including the consumption of illicit drugs) that help to create and sustain a very particular urban scene and particular consumption habits focused around bars, restaurants, clubs and so on’ (Entwistle 2009: 18). As noted, the beliefs and values that constitute the processes through which intermediaries influence consumers’ aesthetic sensibilities are important.

On this point, I wish to make a brief extension to Smith-Maguire and Matthews’ (2012) concept of ‘framing’ based on what we know already. In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to the laborious processes of fashion models (Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2002; 2009 Mears and Finlay 2005; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Soley-Beltran 2006; Mears 2008; 2009; Entwiistle 2009; Wissinger 2007a; 2007b; 2009; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011; Rafferty 2011; Czerniawski 2012; Entwistle and Mears 2012; Jones 2013). Extant literature has identified five categories of cultural labour in which models engage; ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘immaterial’, ‘emotional’, ‘aesthetic’ and ‘affective’. To follow, I present a brief articulation of each to augment our understanding of the framing process.

2.5.1.1 Entrepreneurial Labour

This has been described by Wissinger (2009: 275) as labour in which ‘workers invest time, energy and funds to foster professional relationships and build their productive capacity in return for uncertain rewards’. It is hoped that being seen in the ‘right’ places, speaking to the ‘right’ people will make a model attractive to hire (Neff et al. 2005; Wissinger 2009). Neff et al. (2005) outline eight characteristics of entrepreneurial labour in cultural fields of production and apply these to fashion modelling. For example, ‘risk’ is a dominant characteristic as the industry is defined by a winner-take-all motif (Parmentier and Fischer 2011). That which ameliorates models’ sense of risk is their belief in fashion as a ‘culturally cool’ industry in which to work.

To be ‘in fashion’ embodies valuable cultural meaning to the extent that this narrative has become a cultural commodity (Blumer 1969; Belk, et al. 2010). To be part of this world demands ‘self-investment’ (Neff et al. 2005). This investment can be financial, corporeal and emotional. For instance, models are not paid expenses while travelling to castings, fittings, go-sees etc. while being critiqued by tastemakers on the fruits of their labour. Entrepreneurial
labour also involves ‘compulsory networking’ (Neff et al. 2005) both offline and online (they must have a social media presence) and obligatory attendance at fashionable events during which an image of fashionability must be continuously upheld. ‘Portfolio evaluation’ is a further feature of entrepreneurial work (Neff et al. 2005). A strong portfolio of images not only emphasises the photogenic appeal of the model but also the extent of her/his versatility and adaptability to various campaigns as the whims of fashion change.

Two further characteristics are ‘autonomy and flat career hierarchies’ and ‘creativity’ (Neff et al. 2005). The former refers again to the freelance nature of fashion modelling as well as the lack of a traditional career ladder with fewer levels between entry level and peak positions. This connotes that if a model is discovered by a tastemaker, (s)he can be catapulted straight to the top of the industry i.e. the premise of America’s Next Top Model. Models must be creative insofar as they are obliged to evoke aesthetic singularity through their physical body and persona. ‘Foreshortened careers’ are a further aspect of entrepreneurial labour (Neff et al. 2005). The vast majority of models cannot sustain the chameleonic obligations of high fashion. While they may be useful for a handful of campaigns, their lack of versatility soon renders them useless in the eyes of brands (Parmentier and Fischer 2011). Lastly, ‘international competition’ characterises the entrepreneurial industry (Neff et al. 2005). At its epicentre, images of the model life are anchored in fashion capitals such as London, Paris and New York. The congregation of aspiring models from around the globe to these areas intensifies the contest for cultural capital and subsequent access.

2.5.1.2 Immaterial labour

Immaterial Labour is a term introduced to fashion consumption by Wissinger (2007a; 2009). The author draws from Lazzarato (1996: 133) who describes immaterial labour as those ‘activities which are not normally recognised as “work”- in other words, the kind of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion’. The immaterial labour of cultural intermediaries involves working with cultural codes of dress, fashion and gender in a bid to project a valorised identity that commands the attention and recognition of others. This labour also involves forging relationships and making an impression on gatekeepers of the model life at various fashionable events and parties (Wissinger 2007b). A core aspect then is that it is
performed within a web of relations whereby ‘income’ for such labour is often not monetary but cultural, symbolic and social forms of capital.

2.5.1.3  Emotional labour

Emotional labour has received far greater treatment in fashion literature (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; Mears and Finlay 2005; Wissinger 2009; Entwistle 2004). Mears and Finlay (2005) derive their understanding of the term from Hochschild (1983:7), who describes emotional labour as ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’. The authors further note that models perform emotional labour to resist the objectification to which the industry inevitably subjects them. They do this in order to protect their true identities from the scrutiny levied against them by gatekeepers of the field. Thus, emotional labour involves both exercising detachment from one’s true identity and the projection of a fashionable ‘personality’ (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006). It also takes on another form whereby it is used to ‘induce or suppress feeling, in order to sustain an outward appearance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (Hochschild 1983:7). A form of ‘strategic friendliness’ (Mears and Finlay 2005), it is also described as ‘a form of emotional manipulation of another person using friendliness, politeness, and tact, to achieve a desired outcome’ (Pierce 1995:72). This is most obvious in service industries such as airlines, restaurants etc. (Dowling 2012).

2.5.1.4  Affective Labour

Contrary to the previous two labour forms, affective labour is far more descriptive of what models do (Wissinger 2007a; 2007b). With specific emphasis on fashion modelling, it describes ‘work to stimulate interest in and attention to images by playing on forces that can consciously be perceived as desire, envy or a need to belong (through being fashionable or ‘in the know’); in doing so, they [fashion models] create networks for affective flow that create community. They also, however, produce affective images, by tuning into a felt sense of vitality, aliveness or engagement that takes no particular form, but taps into affective energy that is conveyed via the virtual human contact of the image’ (Wissinger 2007b: 258). Fashion models’ mobilisation of affect can therefore also be referred to as an embodied performance which channels consumer attention toward a particular subject position and a term of
consumption. There are only two conceptualisations of affective labour in the literature as they apply to fashion despite its capacity to stimulate attention and create a connection.

2.5.1.5 Aesthetic Labour

The final, and most popular form of labour discussed in fashion literature is aesthetic (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Entwistle 2002; 2004; 2009; Finkelstein 1991; Mears 2008; 2009; 2011; Wissinger 2009; Soley-Beltran 2006). Aesthetic labour is performed with the purpose of cultivating a ‘look’. The look refers to the ‘whole person’ (Mears 2011), a combination of appearance and persona (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006). As a term that originated in the service literature, aesthetic labour was prioritised as the means by which an employee could ‘look good and sound right’ for the job (Warhurst and Nickson 2001). In fashion, the term has been equated with the commodification of the body through various techniques such as; ‘dieting, working-out, tanning, looking after one’s skin, shaving, waxing, plucking bodily hair, paying regular trips to the hairdresser, the beauty salon, the gym’ (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006:785).

While describing it in such terms, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) have also endeavoured to extend the concept beyond the boundaries of ‘looking good’ and ‘sounding right’ (Warhurst and Nickson 2001). Firstly, they argue that as fashion modelling is predominantly freelance work, models must cultivate a coherent identity in the absence of a corporate aesthetic. Consequently, the authors also acknowledge that aesthetic labour occurs outside the ‘nine to five’ parameters. Finally, their most important contribution to the concept is the idea that a truly embodied account of aesthetic labour must also take into account the emotional aspect of identity (in the creation and expression of ‘personality’). Physical appearance is therefore deemed an extrinsic cue of one’s inner self. In this way, emotional labour constitutes aesthetic labour rather than supplants it (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006).

Above is a brief description of the various labour types performed by cultural intermediaries. These theorisations add to the mediation framework (Smith-Matthews and Maguire 2012) by conceptualising fashion models as labouring bodies. Yet the enactment of such labour to frame the consumption experience demands a fluid performance and as such, a rare degree of expertise.
2.5.2 Expertise

This dimension is the fundamental way by which intermediaries differentiate themselves from typical, varicous consumers. Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012) delineate two types of expertise, although these are not mutually exclusive; ‘professional’ and ‘personal’. If intermediaries are to effectively mediate the ideologies of the model life, they must possess a rare stock of both. Professional expertise is described as being contingent on accomplishments within the field. Within the field of high fashion, professional expertise pertains to the accumulation of capital from working editorial campaigns, prestigious fashion shows, or forging powerful relationships with ‘gatekeepers’ to enhance their position in the field.

‘Personal expertise’ corresponds to a person’s subjective experiences, ideas, beliefs, values, desires, fears etc. that are embodied in their habitus or ‘fashion habitus’ (Entwistle 2009). Cultural capital constitutes a set of socially rare and distinctive attributes such as tastes, skills, tacit knowledge and styles of consumption and production. As such, its embodiment and communication is integral to mediation as it makes the cultural rarity and legitimacy of the model life appear credible to an audience. On this point, I wish to add a further extension to Smith-Maguire and Matthews’ (2012) framework. A non-representational mode of theorising cultural mediation must acknowledge intermediaries’ corporeal knowledge to remain open to the ‘obligatory rhythms’ (Goulding et al. 2009: 768) that shape their mobilisation of affect. Also, (cultural and emotional) capital is required for the reflection on and fluid mobilisation of affective flow during the mediation process. To bolster our understanding of ‘what bodies of various kinds can do before they get to knowing what they are doing’ (Laurier 2011: 71), I present a theoretical underpinning of ‘expertise’. Specifically, I refer to Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990; 1993) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) to further illuminate this dimension.

2.5.2.1 Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

While Bourdieu’s theory of cultural mediation (1984; 1993) is somewhat flawed, his concept of habitus (1977; 1986; 1990) prioritises embodiment and thus if used insightfully, can shed further light on the mediation process. Bourdieu (1990: 53) defines habitus as ‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, a principle of the generation and structuring of practices and representations…objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming
at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them’. Habitus is therefore understood as a deeply inculcated and enduring disposition that structures individuals’ ways of being and doing.

Given its ability to structure action and shape taste, this theory is valuable in helping to understand the embodied performances that mobilise affect during the cultural mediation process. While no two habitus’ are exactly the same, minor differences can still be reflective of individuals’ affiliation to a certain social group i.e. cultural intermediaries of high fashion. Furthermore, while habitus predisposes social actors to certain ways of being and acting, it does not reduce them to passive dupes (Crossley 2001). In this sense, Bourdieu’s theory of practice corresponds nicely to the social context in which I study cultural mediation.

To describe the social context in which habitus structures action, Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of ‘field’ positions social agents as players in a game. The field of high fashion is socially produced by a number of key players (Blumer 1969). A field is a key arena in which players ultimately compete to access, and subsequently mediate the model life. Entwistle (2009) argues that luxury fashion operates like a field in that it is a unique consumption world with ambiguous values and statuses’ that only those within the field prioritise. She continues to state that it is near impossible not to refer to Bourdieu’s theoretical contributions when attempting to capture the mediation processes within the field of fashion.

Furthermore, habitus conforms nicely to theorisations of affect and its circulation. For as Holt (1998) notes, habitus is also pre-discursive and refers more to an embodied form of thinking based on felt experience and affect. In this sense, intermediaries’ habitus’ responsible for shaping taste are a tacit, embodied knowledge of the qualities that constitute aesthetic taste. Not only do the constituents of habitus evade cognitive capture, but they are also explicitly non-rational. In other words, habitus is felt through an embodied language, the vocabularies of which are the affective intensities of which I have spoken. Such is the explanation for why intermediaries often struggle to articulate what it is about a certain look or design that they find pleasurable. Instead they rely on the use of ambiguous language such as ‘gut feeling’, ‘je ne sais quoi’ or ‘feel for the game’. Due to their command of incipient taste (Blumer 1969) and affective capacity to mediate an emotional tie, cultural intermediaries are at the helm of high fashion culture leading a ‘movement from an out-moded past toward a dim, uncertain, but exploitable immediate future’ (Blumer 1969: 289).
Facilitating their affective capacity are various forms of capital. Bourdieu (1984; 1990) refers to capital as the resources that command exchange value and that are distributed across a social network. There are six types of capital identified by this research, all of which are integral in considering how cultural intermediaries mobilise affect. This being the case, I refer to various forms of capital (e.g. social, symbolic, cultural etc.) as encompassing cultural intermediaries’ affective capacity. Also important to note is that these various aspects of capital can become transformed or converted into other forms (e.g. cultural into economic capital).

To briefly explain these forms, ‘economic capital’ refers to financial resources such as income and assets that hold value. As Crossley (2001) states, this is an extremely rational form of capital. The second, ‘social capital’, describes the various relationships and connections to organisations or networks one might possess. These affiliations can become helpful when in pursuit of a particular social goal. As such, social capital is important where cultural mediation is concerned as it facilitates greater opportunities for social advancement in the field.

Thirdly, ‘symbolic capital’ refers to status or recognition that often becomes bestowed on an individual who has met certain institutionalised criteria. In an affective economy, this capital pertains to the cultural meanings endowed upon the cultural intermediary as a result of working a prestigious fashion show or exclusive campaign. An additional and important form of capital introduced by Shilling (1991; 1992; 1993) is ‘embodied capital’. This relates to the physical, aesthetic qualities of the body that are ascribed exchange value in fields of cultural and aesthetic production. In discussing the concept further, Crossley (2001: 107) argues the concept of embodied capital ‘locate[s] those bodily states that might be deemed desirable within the context of the markets in which they have value’. For a campaign such as ‘heroin chic’ for example, bodily attributes such as pale white skin, dark rings under the eyes, a thin build, minimal body fat and a generally gaunt appearance function as currency within the field of high fashion which celebrates this look.

A further form of capital not mentioned specifically by Bourdieu, yet developed from his conceptual framework is ‘emotional capital’. During her research on families, Alatt (1993: 143) describes emotional capital as ‘the stock of emotional resources built up over time within families and which children could draw upon’. As Reay (2000) further notes, emotional capital generally remains within the bounds of the affective relationships shared between families. I further conceptualise emotional as derived from the intense intimacy felt by cultural intermediaries to the ideologies of the model life and high fashion. Cultural intermediaries’
emotional capital is critical as it facilitates their mobilisation of affect that transmutes the consumption experience with the capacity to forge emotional relationships with bodies in relation. For example, Jenkins (2009) observes how consumers make affective investments in cultural materials such as music. Upon forging an affective tie, the aesthetic consumption experience mediated by high fashion intermediaries provokes an affective investment as it becomes inseparable from the intensified emotions that stem from bodies’ emotional capital.

Finally, when we speak of cultural intermediaries, the cultural capital they embody holds significant influence on the mediation process. As mentioned, cultural capital constitutes a set of socially rare and distinctive attributes such as tastes, skills, tacit knowledge and styles of consumption and production. Models’ embodiment of rarefied cultural capital ‘earns the respect of others through the consumption of objects that are ideationally difficult and so can only be consumed by those few who have acquired the ability to do so…the habitus organises how one classifies the universe of consumption objects to which one is exposed, constructing desire toward consecrated objects and disgust toward objects that are not valued in the field’ (Holt 1998: 4). Importantly, cultural capital can exist in three forms; embodied in the form of enduring dispositions, objectified in various cultural objects (imagery, instruments, film etc.) or institutionalised as a form of objectification that must be set apart (e.g. Kate Moss) (Bourdieu 1986). As noted, these various forms all work together and are inextricably linked in facilitating intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect and subsequent creation of an affective tie to the aesthetic consumption experience.

As with social and symbolic capital, the cultural significance of emotional and cultural capital is field specific. That is, they correspond to unique depictions of value in specific fields (Crossley 2001). From a high fashion perspective, the embodiment of rarefied cultural capital situates cultural intermediaries within an exclusive social milieu from where they mediate consumption experiences of the model life. The cultural capital they command facilitates a more ‘natural’ performance (Bourdieu 1984) (that is, reinvigoration of their emotional capital) that in turn connotes an effortless belonging to this elevated reality, much to the captivation of a fashion audience.

However, while these conceptualisations dramatically aid the aims of this research, it is also necessary to mention that Bourdieu was not without his critics. Yet given the argument already forwarded by Entwistle (2009), depending how they are applied, his theorisations can be very useful in elucidating the consumption and production processes of cultural intermediaries that
mobilise affect. Also, given that this research thesis is not an explicit sociological exploration of habitus, capital and field; I will briefly address the main criticisms of his work and follow Crossley (2001) in the application of a remedy.

I begin with a critique forwarded by Crossley (2001) that this work also shares. The game metaphor described by Bourdieu connotes that its players are bound to their specific social context by a strong affective grip. Bourdieu theorises this grip in terms of ‘libido’. Siding with Crossley (2001), this work conceptualises this affective attachment not as a biological impulse but rather as a ‘desire for recognition’ as mentioned when discussing the basis of an affective economy.

As Blumer (1969) also notes, the ultimate aspirational point for consumers of high fashion was to be ‘in fashion’, and thus, to reap the cultural capital which this achievement bestows. Cultural intermediaries of high fashion desire to be ‘in fashion’ and ‘naturally’ embody the ideologies of accessible model life because it commands recognition. Rather than a biological impulse, cultural intermediaries’ deep-rooted emotional desire for connection and approval is that which drives, and influences their embodied consumption and production processes. Furthermore, as Crossley (2001) notes, desire for recognition is a specifiable disposition. That is, it facilitates intermediaries’ processes that forge the affective social relation to be captured more easily through empirical exploration (Crossley 1996; 2001).

Additionally, there have been two main criticisms levied against Bourdieu’s theory of practice. The first of which is presented by Alexander (1995) who argued that habitus articulates the concept of agency using two incompatible approaches. Alexander (1995) argues that the first explains action based on non-rational, culturally inherited traditions. Yet, the second describes agency as strategically rational, which in turn prioritises the actor’s self-interest. As Crossley (2001) clarifies, habitus is a basis for innovative and improvised action rather than adhering to tradition or norms. Furthermore, the author defends Bourdieu by noting how strategic rationality is only possible through habitus as one must possess a tacit ‘feel for’ their specific context in order to act.

For example, in high fashion, intermediaries’ actions are strategic in that they attempt to amass greater cultural capital to reaffirm their belonging to the model life. The consumption and production processes through which to achieve this ideal are context specific and in that sense, somewhat traditional. For example, the artistic ideologies re-appropriated at fashion week or in luxury stores are strategic; yet, ultimately adhere to the conventions of high fashion aesthetic
taste. To belong in this arena and to embody its ideologies necessitates a tacit understanding of high fashions ‘tradition’, as well as its strategic orientations. In this sense, tradition and strategy are not incompatible as Alexander (1995) claims.

A further criticism applied to Bourdieu is the apparent deterministic nature of habitus. By this, his critics argue that structures endlessly reproduce themselves due to agency being restricted. Such a view would deem cultural actors as puppets to the structures in which they act. To help restore some clarity to the argument, I refer to Parmentier and Fischer (2007), who argue that the degree of agency is determined by one’s dedication to the ideologies of the contested symbolic space. In order to mediate cultural taste, one cannot reside on the periphery but rather, must be at the core of this space from where trends are created and diffused.

Yet this does not necessarily restrict agency. Rather, cultural intermediaries’ labour reinforces Bourdieu’s (1984) claims that habitus is both structured and structuring. In this sense, habitus is not reduced specifically to structure or agency but rather a combination of both manifested in practice. Of course, there has been further debate as to this structure/agency divide within habitus yet much is dependent on its application. In this context as I have noted, it can be applied quite fruitfully to facilitate an understanding of cultural mediation as I will illustrate in far greater detail in subsequent chapters. In his continued critique, Crossley (2001) identifies some further, yet minor inaccuracies. For instance, given its regular accusations of being deterministic, Crossley (2001) notes that habitus is sometimes substituted for the agent. This is misleading, as it is always the agent rather than the habit that acts strategically or innovatively.

Bourdieu (1984) does acknowledge however, how habits become deeper ingrained in one’s habitus due to one’s continued predisposition to certain forces in the field. Yet this remains somewhat unclear. To remedy these issues, we might return to the phenomenological roots of habit and situate habitus within a broader context of analysis that clearly embraces embodied agency and reflexivity (Crossley 2001). In doing so, Crossley (2001) refers to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the theorist’s concept of corporeal schema.

2.5.2.2 Merleau-Ponty’s Corporeal Schema

For Merleau-Ponty (1962:82), we do not have, but rather we are our bodies; ‘The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and to be continually committed to them’. Our body is the source through which we perceive and are affected by the world. The
way in which Merleau-Ponty (1962) implies this concept challenges dualistic conceptions of mind/body and subject/object. Movement of the body in this sense does not demand a conscious or reflective knowledge but rather, a tacit, embodied knowledge. This type of tacit knowledge refers to a pre-reflective sense of the environment in which someone is acting relative to their body. The degree to which a person possesses this embodied knowledge is evidenced by their ability to move around in that space without first having to think of how they might do this. In other words, their performance appears ‘natural’ or ‘effortless’.

Crossley (2001:123, original emphasis) illustrates this point with the example of driving a car. He observes how he does not have to think about changing gear, his speed or the weight he is commanding. Instead he feels it; ‘I do not think about the car. I think as the car, from the point of view of the car’. Similarly, the corporeal schema is fundamental to understanding intermediaries’ ‘natural’ belonging to the model life through effortless styles of consumption and production that circulate affect. Contrastingly, when performance is not ‘effortless’, the fit between a person’s embodied knowledge and cultural milieu breaks down. When this occurs, the labour that was previously disguised as effortless is exposed. The result is an interruption to the flow of affect and subsequently, the illusion is revealed (Crossley 2001).

The relationship between ‘naturalness’ and habitus is also a common trait of the corporeal schema. Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes habit as ‘sediment of past activity that remains alive in the present in the form of the structures of the corporeal schema’. A critical point as it pertains to mediation is that the emotions felt from past affective experiences remain pinned to the corporeal schema and determine individuals’ capacities to act in the present. Crossley’s car analogy refers to his inability to feel the ‘biting point’ when proceeding from a traffic light. His embodied ‘failure’ stalls the car and leads to his and potentially others’ embarrassment for him. In this example, the ‘breach’ (Thrift 2000) in what was intended to be a fluid embodied performance mobilises affect, the contagious nature of which invokes negative rather than positive responses from bodies in relation.

Examples within a high fashion context are regularly felt when a fashion model falls on the runway, looks uncomfortable in an image etc. The result disrupts the flow of positive affect and instead translates into negative energies that affect viewers’ bodies resulting in emotions such as embarrassment and awkwardness rather than invoking passion or desire. Of course, the impact of these events alters a body’s disposition within a nanosecond of being afflicted and so, cannot be captured by cognitive processes until they translate as emotion.
2.5.3 **Impact**

Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012) begin their brief discussion of ‘impact’ by linking it to the construction of legitimacy. This, they note, is the primary role of the cultural intermediary. However, the degree to which this legitimacy is felt depends on impact, which differs for each person. The authors note that the objective of the cultural intermediary is to create an enduring impact that extends beyond the momentary interaction with the consumption experience. As it pertains to high fashion, I posit impact as descriptive of an affective response. To articulate impact is difficult as it is both pre-cognitive and pre-discursive; ‘affective response takes place below the level of awareness; consequently, it makes sense that even those who are supposed to know what it is that makes a model command attention (e.g. the people who represent and manage models, such as model agents, or those who hire models, such as magazine editors) often remain unable to exactly explain a model’s success’ (Wissinger 2007a: 237).

While the initial impact of affective flow only lasts for ‘a half second’ (Thrift 2004) or ‘a few seconds’ (Nathanson 1992), the experience still manages to forge an intense and enduring connection with bodies in relation. Wissinger (2007a: 238) further argues that the intensity of the experience ‘is measurable by its impact. If an image is hard to ignore, catches one’s eye, is upsetting and exciting, its intensity is affecting. Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, but only when qualified as emotion (that is, assigned a meaning)’. Given the relationship that exists between affect and attention, a consumption experience that captivates bodies’ attention is dependent on cultural intermediaries’ suffusion of the experience with affect. A consumption experience of significant affective capacity can create impact to the extent that the intensities felt resonate with bodies in relation to such a degree that they alter bodies’ dispositions and permeate their emotional capital. The impact and subsequent emotional tie made by intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect legitimates the experience. The capacity to create is connection is crucial as individuals cannot desire something unless there is already an affective tie (Crossley 2001).

As all three dimensions are critically interlinked, the expertise with which cultural intermediaries frame the consumption experience is determinant of the affective response provoked and enduring impact made. Compared to the previous two dimensions of mediation, Smith-Matthews and Maguire (2012) say little about impact due to its non-discursive and embodied nature. Indeed, any articulation of impact must be understood as a representation of
that which is felt during consumption before translating to emotion. Greater understanding of this and the previous dimensions necessitate further empirical exploration.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has made an argument for greater appreciation of the affective dimension of cultural mediation. With consumption experiences becoming increasingly hedonic (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), cultural belief systems such as high fashion mediate experiences that no longer represent reality. Instead, they depict alternate to which consumers are hailed (Goldman and Papson 1996). This has heralded a new era of consumption where the aesthetic experience is prioritised over the functionality of the consumer good. Consumption experiences now embody ‘surplus value’ in the form of a shared meaning, social relation, or emotional connection that did not exist before cultural mediation took place (Arvidsson 2005).

Yet the over-reliance on representational approaches has missed the supreme importance of intermediaries’ embodied consumption and production processes that mobilise affect. I have argued that consumer research must acknowledge the affective economy that governs contemporary consumption. The ‘affect’ to which I refer, is a contagious, embodied life energy with transformative capacity to shape enduring dispositions and alter individuals’ perceptions of reality. Upon provocation of an affective response, bodies in relation are captivated to imaginatively inhabit an alternate reality and subject position within which their unfulfilled desires for recognition are realised. Cultural intermediaries are therefore integral to the production of aesthetic value in an affective economy due to their effortless affective capacity.

To shed further light on the processes that mobilise affect, I foreground fashion models as a unique group of cultural intermediaries whose impact on consumption is significant, yet unspecified. I adopt the framework outlined by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012) which delineates the mediation process into three stages. These are ‘framing’, ‘expertise’ and ‘impact’. Framing involves the legitimisation of consumption experiences as desirable. When the intensities that suffuse consumption experiences capture the attention and imagination of bodies in relation, the experience becomes framed as legitimate. This necessitates an expertise, which I have outlined here as forms of capital, namely, emotional and cultural capital. The circulation of affective flow via embodied labour processes produces impact in the form of an affective response. This ensures the consumption experience resonates and subsequently forges
and affective tie with bodies in relation. This tie legitimates the authenticity of the model life and reaffirms fashion models’ status as rarefied arbiters of taste from this reality. Before illustrating these processes empirically, the following chapter outlines my chosen methods of data collection and analysis.
3. **Methodology**

*O Sleep, bid your dreams,*  
*which are indistinguishable from the real shapes they imitate,*  
*put on the appearance of King Ceyx, and go to Alcyone in the city of Trachis,*  
*which Hercules made famous.*  
*There let them conjure up a vision of the shipwreck,*  
*for this is Juno’s command.*

Ovid XI: 453.

3.1 **Introduction**

I begin this chapter by noting that the volatile nature of affect is such, that it can only be felt or experienced. Its impact is therefore difficult, although not impossible to capture or understand in any conventional methodological sense (Blackman and Venn 2010). Moreover, it must be acknowledged that while ‘no methodology is perfect, what matters are the insights that may be gained’ (Shankar and Patterson 2001: 487). For instance, while we can only experience affect, we can to some extent understand, or at least reflect on emotion. In this sense, emotion can be described as a *embodied* representation of affect (O’Sullivan 2001). It adheres to bodies, affecting their behaviour long after the moment of affective response. Such is the reason for using emotion as a fluid embodied translation of affective response (Arnould and Price 1993; Elliott 1998; Ahmed 2004) as both constitute the same consumption/emotional experience. To facilitate the aims of this research, it is not necessary to capture affect, although this is becoming increasingly possible (Hansen 2004; Clough and Halley 2007; Featherstone 2010). Instead, we must clarify our understanding of the processes by which it is mobilised to frame the consumption experience as legitimate and authentic.

To achieve this, this research employs personal introspection (Hill *et al.* 2014) as a method of contextualising the affective intensities circulated by intermediaries. As argued by Shankar and Patterson (2001:492), ‘before we can ever hope to understand others, we must first understand ourselves’. It is vital the researcher examine her/his own personal and socio-cultural experience as this facilitates interpretation (Shankar *et al.* 2001). Reflection is one of the main ways by which researchers can further the scope of interpretive research (Shankar and Patterson 2001). While deemed controversial for quite some time, Denzin (1989: 12) has argued that ‘interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher’. As such, personal introspection cannot be omitted if an insightful, interpretive account is to be reached.
Introspective passages are depicted at the beginning of this thesis and also in Chapters Four and Five. Combined with this, the primary form of data collection used by this research is narrative inquiry. This method facilitates access toemic descriptions of the intensity and contagious nature of affect (Hill et al. 2014). Furthermore, narrative is an essential tool with which we might make sense of our reality (Shankar et al. 2001). An understanding of the mediatory processes that orient consumer behaviour is well suited to a narrative approach given its capacity to capture and articulate the experiences that constitute reality. It is therefore a useful device to trace the embodied experiences consumed through the subconscious; ‘we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative’ (Schriffin 1996:167).

Expanding on these ideas, the following section outlines my interpretive stance to research as well as the various ontological, epistemological and axiological issues that underpin my choice of methodology. From here, I provide solid justification for my decision to adopt narrative inquiry as it connects to my ‘version’ of interpretivism. I will also provide details on how I implemented this methodology. This is followed by an articulation of my analytical approach that constituted a combination of a holistic-content and categorical content perspectives as outlined by Lieblich et al. (1998).

3.2 My Interpretive Stance

To begin this process, I outline potential orientations that guide available methodological stances, namely, positivist and interpretivist. As argued by Hudson and Ozanne (1988), it is crucial that at the initial juxtaposition be made if we are to advance our understanding of consumer behaviour. I adopt an interpretive position that assumes there is not just one objective truth to be sought as positivists claim. Rather, there can be multiple truths that are perceived relative to the social context in which they occur. Intermediaries’ of the model life embody their own ‘truth’ or ‘belief’ in its existence and express it through their consumption and production processes.

As an interpretivist, this narrative inquiry had to be framed within the social context of high fashion. As argued by Morse (1994:1), ‘[t]he laboratory of the qualitative researcher is everyday life and cannot be contained in a test tube, started, stopped, manipulated, or washed down the sink’. The high fashion ‘scene’ is a consumption space where intermediaries’ perform the aesthetic, symbolic, affective and social components of consumption and production processes.
(Pettinger 2004; Entwistle 2009; Carah 2014; Arvidsson 2005). Their culturally legitimated performance of mediation institutionalises a particular style of consumption within the field (Holt 1998). In this sense, my own subjective experiences of high fashion have influenced my research findings not through choice *per se*, but rather, as a necessary prerequisite to (Hudson and Ozanne 1988) and consequence of conducting interpretive research.

3.2.1 Ontological Issues

The ontological acknowledgement that there may in fact be multiple truths is integral to understanding how the mobilisation of affect shapes behaviour during the mediation process. The adoption of an interpretivist approach also contains important assumptions regarding the nature of social beings within the context of study. For instance, as fashion is socially constructed (Blumer 1969), cultural intermediaries are active in shaping their environment. This is at odds with the positivistic view that states they are acted upon. As an interpretivist, I conceptualise the cultural intermediary as one who ‘confronts a world that he must interpret in order to act instead of an environment to which he responds because of his organisation’ (Blumer 1969: 15). Hudson and Ozanne (1988) exemplify this point by depicting a consumer that collects coupons. The agency of the individual communicates thriftiness to others. Similarly, the processes of cultural valorisation performed by intermediaries impact individuals and shape their concept of ‘reality’ through creating an impact that alters bodies’ enduring dispositions.

The intensities and meanings that come to characterise this connection are not idiosyncratic but rather, are socialised through intermediaries’ shared styles appropriation and interpretation within the social network (Shankar et al. 2001). An analysis of the processes that forge this tie will further help understand cultural mediation as an integral prerequisite to consumers’ co-creation of meaning. For consumption experiences only mean something when they are experienced in relation to others (Gergen 1991). Recognition that the social world is not fixed implies our bodies are open to being affected, impacted and influenced by the behaviour of others and also by the social institutions that govern these relationships (Fullbrook 2001). Thus, from an ontological perspective, I argue that cultural intermediaries’ consumption and production processes animate a representation of the model life that upon the creation of an affective tie, constitutes a meaningful reality for bodies in relation. These processes are legitimated within the parameters set by the social and cultural institutions in which these fashion intermediaries are embedded (Shankar et al. 2001).
3.2.2 Axiological Issues

The assumption that reality is socially constructed and shaped also raises axiological questions, specifically regarding the nature of evaluation. Due to its intuitive element, a common accusation levied at interpretive research by the positivist tradition is that our ‘conclusions’ enjoy fleeting relevance. However, this is to assume that the overriding goal of knowledge is to seek a finite explanation. Rather, as interpretivists argue, one cannot decipher an explanation but merely an understanding (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). A fundamental belief that shapes the interpretivist tradition is that ‘the process of understanding is a never-ending process – a hermeneutic circle (this is one usage of the term). In other words, what was interpreted enters into current interpretations, just as current interpretations will influence future interpretations. Therefore, interpretations are always incomplete’ (Hudson and Ozanne 1988: 510). Such, interpretive researchers of consumer behaviour can only ever gain an understanding rather than the understanding (Denzin 1989).

Due to its ephemeral nature, the culturally valorised constituents of high fashion are continuously changing and cannot receive a definitive explanation. As Hudson and Ozanne (1988) argue, researchers’ capacity to understand such a concept and the ideologies that underpin it depend on his/her grasp of the *Verstehen* for that culture. *Verstehen* refers to an understanding of the various shared meanings, beliefs, rituals and contexts associated to a particular culture (Wax 1967). Furthermore, it is not simply enough to gain understanding alone but combined with this, the researcher must have a comprehensive understanding of the ideologies that shape and motivate behaviour. Given that the model life contains a specialised vocabulary salient to the dynamics of a specific social context (Alvesson and Karreman 2000), its authentication is bolstered by the mediation of the artistic ideologies that underpin it. To understand the ideas and beliefs that constitute this reality, one must trace the consumption and production processes that diffuse its legitimated representation to high fashion audiences.

3.2.3 Epistemological Issues

Epistemology as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985:37) concerns ‘the relationship between the knower and what can be known’. Fundamentally, the conventional distinction that separates ontology and epistemology disappears due to the subjective nature of interpretation and the impossibility of comprehending reality before it affects one’s embodied state (Lincoln and
Guba 1998; Shankar et al. 2001). In terms of what can be known, as the emphasis within the interpretivist tradition is on understanding rather than the positivistic approach to explaining, there is constant interactivity between the researcher and cultural intermediaries’ in the social context. It is this connectivity that allows the formulation of interpretations as the research proceeds.

Also, these interpretations are time and context bound (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Positivists on the other hand, treat particulars as holding no intrinsic significance, instead seeking to produce a generalised conclusion. Interpretivists are very much concerned with the particulars of a phenomenon. For example, Hudson and Ozanne (1988) focus on the retail atmosphere and various values attached to Bloomingdales. From an interpretivist perspective, the ambience in this store contrasts greatly to that of Saks. As the impact of each is dependent on consumer perception, the interpretivist’s role is to present as detailed an account as possible in order to achieve a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) and fruitful interpretation of the particular context (Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

In terms of causality, while positivists place a premium on causal linkages, interpretivists argue that there can be no distinction made between cause and effect and as such, reality cannot be fragmented without changing it (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Positivists believe that the researcher must be independent from the research so as not to unduly influence its findings (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). This stance of course derives from their emphasis on producing definitive conclusions. Interpretivists on the other hand, believe that fruitful interpretations cannot be separated from a researcher’s prior knowledge. Thus, to perform quality interpretive research, there must be ‘co-operative inquiry’ (Reason and Rowan 1981; Wallendorf 1987) on the part of the cultural intermediary and the researcher. This will ultimately contribute to drawing interpretations with a unique point of view and generate rich insights that bestow value on the work (Hirschman 1986).

To collect data, interpretivists believe that in studying a phenomenon such as processes of cultural mediation, the best approach is the use of a human instrument (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Similar studies of emotion and consumption (e.g. Denzin 1984; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Joy and Sherry 2003; Joy et al. 2014) have not proposed hypotheses or sought to test theories. Rather, they adopted an embodied mode of inquiry that facilitated the interpretation and description of the emotional triggers felt during the consumption experience. The human
instrument of narrative inquiry is thus ideally placed to capture interpretations and descriptions of the processes that mobilise affect.

3.3 Embracing the Narrative Turn

My narrative perspective adheres to the view that the consumer is free to construct her/his reality within the parameters set by social and cultural institutions (Shankar et al. 2001). The parameters of the model life reality are set by rare cultural/emotional capital. These restrictive boundaries become further ingrained through cultural intermediaries’s consumption and production that reaffirms this reality’s cultural rarity. Yet, a representation of the model life is mediated to audiences that wait to imaginatively consume this animated imagery beyond these exclusive parameters. To further understand how the representation is authenticated (i.e. made meaningful), I drew primarily from Shankar et al. (2001), Shankar et al. (2009), Alvesson and Karreman (2000) and Shankar and Patterson (2001) whose contributions to narrative inquiry have influenced this research. From an analytical perspective, I have adopted a holistic-content/categorical perspective as outlined by Lieblich et al. (1998) in their seminal work on narrative research.

Individuals contextualise their experiences through narrative. As such, a narrative approach facilitates access to quasi-biographical stories of my participants. In accessing these experiences, the researcher seeks to understand the world from the point of view of the informant (Kvale 1996) through attaining a first person description of a particular domain of experience (Thompson et al. 1989). As affect is immanent to experience (O’Sullivan 2001), narrative can be used to make sense of the aesthetic consumption experience animated by cultural intermediaries. As noted in both previous chapters, the body feels affect in the immediate present, evading the capture of rational cognition while provoking an affective response from bodies in relation. In this case, affect might appear as un-actualisable, impossible to capture. Yet de Man (1970: 148-149, original emphasis) states that experience, as we understand it, ‘implies the necessary experience of any present as a passing experience, that makes the past irrevocable and unforgettable, because it is inseparable from any present or future’. As mentioned, an experience of high impact adheres to the body where it inevitably constitutes an emotion (Merleau-Ponty 1969). For example, the affective capacity of a perfume scent can impact a person beneath their cognitive awareness before invoking an emotional longing for a more favourable past (Goulding 2002).
The way we make sense of, and navigate these subjective and fictional realities is through narrative. The impact made by the affective capacity of the perfume scent for example, triggers past affective resonances and reanimates hedonic emotions associated with this vicarious past (or future). These mental imaginings become transferred onto the branded perfume or context being consumed to engender a meaningful consumption experience. Given the prerequisite necessity of triggering affective resonances and (re)establishing an emotional tie, signification is best understood as affective function18 (O’Sullivan 2001: 126). Therefore, affect, while primarily ‘affective’, is most significant within narrative as it can only ever be understood as a representation of the original experience that adhered to one’s corporeal schema and remains constitutive of her/his emotional capital (O’Sullivan 2001: 126; Merleau-Ponty 1962: Bourdieu 1984). In other words, affect both constitutes and shapes representation. A narrative approach will therefore generate interpretations as to the consumption and production processes that trigger and shape bodies’ enduring dispositions (Elliott 1998) during the animation of a meaningful consumption experience.

3.4 The Key Features of Narratives

Narratives are stories whose cultural and social significance has bestowed them with ontological status (Shankar et al. 2001). They are a lens through which we experience and negotiate our subjective realities; “Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio’s Saint Ursula), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative…caring for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans-historical, trans-cultural: it is ‘simply there, like life itself’” (Barthes 1993: 251-252).

Narratives disseminated by cultural belief systems such as high fashion inculcate persons by representing affect-laden imagery of higher realities, ideal subject positions etc. that trigger a desire for recognition. Narratives are integral to an affective economy as their animation evokes affective capacity that orients consumer behaviour. Their impact pervades our culture to such an extent that Bruner (1987) has noted we are genetically predisposed to understanding the

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18 The conceptualisation of meaning as the effect of affect (O’Sullivan 2001; Wissinger 2007a)
narrative form. As such, I posit the stories we tell are representative of felt emotion and the enduring dispositions that underpin it (Elliott 1998).

We must also appreciate that the act of telling stories is one of creation and construction rather than mere remembering or retelling (Shankar et al. 2009). The narrative form provides individuals with archetypal ways of being in the world (Shankar et al. 2009). When we unconsciously appropriate this form (Bruner 1987) to negotiate reflection of our experiences, the stories told while perhaps not ‘true’, remain credible. Indeed, ‘truths are illusions of which one has forgotten they are illusions’ (Nietzsche 1873/1995: 92). Narrative is therefore not just limited to articulating literal experience but also offers legitimacy to the authenticity of those aesthetic consumption experiences that have been dreamt or fantasised.

For a narrative exploration of cultural mediation, the ideas presented within this chapter can be applied in two main ways (Shankar et al. 2001). The first involves the construction of narrative around the ‘turning point moments’ (Denzin 1989) that alter peoples’ dispositions. Examples of such are leaving home, the death of a parent, beginning a new career etc. Given the nature of my sample, it is highly unlikely that any of my participants were experiencing these moments at the time of interaction. In this case, I loosely adopted the alternative approach outlined by Gergen and Gergen (1988) to provide clarity to my interpretations and organise the various themes within the story to be told.
A key element of an insightful, engaging narrative is its plot structure. Most narratives have basic plot structures which correspond to one of four main themes; comedy, romance, tragedy and satire (Shankar et al. 2001). Having decided on plot, narratives must contain clear demarcation signs in the form of a beginning, middle and end. For instance, the majority of narratives establish an ‘end point’ that is valued by those involved in telling the story. However, I adopt the above structure as a loose basis upon which to frame my interpretations. As such, in the spirit of high fashion, the ‘end point’ is one that ultimately never comes and is left to readers’ interpretation (Denzin 1984). Regardless of the concretised nature of its end, a coherent narrative must select a series of events that help guide readers’ interpretations of the story.

In this instance, the sequences chosen to articulate cultural intermediaries’ processes are various events in high fashion such as prestigious fashion shows, photo-shoots, castings and moments of general social interaction that help develop the story. These events are significant in that they are a contextual frame for cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect and thus,
ensure the reaffirmation high fashion’s cultural rarity as well as the continued legitimation of
the model life as an authentic reality.

3.5 Implementing a Narrative Approach

While high fashion models were my respondents of choice, I supplemented these narratives
with further intermediaries of the field such as photographers, designers, bookers, stylists,
editors etc. In considering a sample, the aim of the study was to involve intermediaries
(specifically models) with significant expertise and experience in the high fashion industry.
This was not done with the goal of producing an objective representation of cultural mediation
but rather, to ensure a diversity and variety of experiences that would best inform my research
aims.

The notion of access to the high fashion ‘world’ was also an initial concern. Before entering
the field and establishing a relationship with my participants, I considered approaching this
research from an ethnographic perspective. Yet with access granted based on various forms of
capital (social, symbolic, cultural etc.), my initial rejections at four different open castings and
a proven lack of photogenic appeal had left me little option where ethnography was concerned.
However, adopting an alternative approach, I openly identified as a researcher who was writing
a previously untold story on high fashion. This admission granted me further and quicker access
than ethnography ever would. From the point of view of my participants, while being
‘documented’ or ‘shadowed’ perhaps did not bestow them with significant cultural capital,19
my involvement as researcher certainly legitimated their status to an extent, albeit temporarily.

To gain access, I contacted two friends who happened to be full time models based in Dublin
but who regularly commuted to London for further work. I was also fortunate in that I knew a
third friend living in the Shoreditch area of London who worked as a freelance fashion photographer. At the time of speaking with him, his portfolio was bringing him to the attention of several influential clients20 in the industry. From these relationships, I expanded my network
and over the course of various trips in 2011, I began to develop regular contact and built a
rapport with various fashion agents21 who themselves were tempting to negotiate a

19 Given that I, an ‘unknown’ was the researcher
20 Mostly models and also, two interviews had been scheduled in relation to developing his portfolio into a
collection.
21 Models, bookers, designers, photographers, make-up artists etc.
enhance their position in the field. These participants also introduced me to various other actors which aided in extending my network for research.

The initial bulk of interviews were conducted during consecutive trips to London in June/July/August of 2012. Further supplementary interviews conducted during February/March 2013, June/July 2013 and September/December 2013 to help further unravel the sequence of events taking place. Final interviews were held during February 2014 which included reflections of our discussions on both my part and that of my participants. Over a span of 1 -½ years, I amassed the narratives of nineteen fashion models, four bookers, five designers/creative directors, three stylists, three photographers as well as brief, casual conversations with various agents and consumers within the field.

One limitation levied at narrative inquiry is that given the close collaboration and time commitment necessary, it is an unsuitable approach where a larger sample of participants is concerned (Bell 2002). However, for an interpretive study, I reached a point where I began to experience ‘theoretical saturation’ (Goulding 1998), whereupon no new information shone through to further unravel the sequence of events of the overall story. On this point, Gaskell (2000) has argued that anywhere between twenty and twenty-five interviews is more than sufficient in order to allow for a fruitful interpretation of findings. A larger number of interviews do not necessarily represent an increase in the quality of data or insight. Rather, the narrative interview, although smaller in amassed quantity, often (and did) constitutes more than one ‘interview’ per respondent in order to allow time for reflection on the part of the researcher and participant (Shankar et al. 2001).

Also, narrative interviews can be quite long, stretching to four hours in some cases. The duration of my interviews was on average one and a half to two hours, with the exception of three interviews that lasted between twenty minutes and a half hour due to time constraints. In nearly all cases, these interviews consisted of more than one session of a similar length (one and a half to two hours). In framing this research around the parameters of high fashion, all interviews were conducted in a very relaxed manner at various different contexts (e.g. bars, cafés, studios, offices, etc.) within high fashion.

22 London Men’s Fashion Week took place from 15th -17th June 2012.
23 London Fashion Week took place September 13th -17th 2013.
The informality did not pose a great problem as central to an interpretivist view of implementation is the idea that ‘no longer does the writer-as-interviewer hide behind the question-answer format, the apparatuses of the interview machine’ (Denzin 2001:30). As such, it was best that the ‘interviews’ took the form of in-depth conversations and not necessarily conform to a rigid structure. Furthermore, the lack of ‘structure’ and free flowing nature of the interviews helped to maintain the Gestalt of the narrative. This has been defined by Holloway and Jefferson (2000:34) as ‘a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda informing each person’s life’. Similar to Verstehen, it represents the overarching theme or motif of the story being told. A voidance of the traditional restrictions imposed by a question/answer format also promotes self-reflection from both parties, the importance of which I have already mentioned. During to the informality of the process, richer descriptions begin to emerge as instances of shared ‘sameness’ (Denzin 2001) are revealed leading the researcher to become a willing participant in the story-telling experience.

From a practical perspective, narrative interviewing can be quite challenging. Although there is much literature that delineates narrative approaches, these are primarily written from a philosophical/ontological perspective. As a result, there is little information that outlines a practical method of implementation. In this sense, narrative can be quite exciting as the researcher is free to develop her/his own style of narrative methodology (Lichrou 2009). With regard to implementation, conducting narrative interviews necessitates what Kvale (1996: 31) describes as deliberate naiveté or an ‘openness to new and unexpected phenomena’. Rather than focus exclusively on the elicitation of opinions or attitudes, my focus was fixed on generating rich descriptions of cultural intermediaries’ lived experiences. In developing and phrasing my questions, I avoided the use of why-questions (Thompson et al. 1989; Kvale 1996; Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). A focus on experiences allowed for a greater description of these instances as uttered by the intermediary her/himself. I was also conscious not to probe my participants for further articulations of certain points and instead, allowed the conversation to flow spontaneously (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000).

To arrange the implementation of interviews, I adopted the narrative interview guide as outlined by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 62-65). It is important to acknowledge however that the authors do admit their guide presents an ‘ideal-typical procedure which may rarely be accomplished’. They also recognise that ‘in practice, the NI often requires a compromise between narrative and questioning’ (2000: 67). Their method involves the following phases.
The preparation phase (before the interview) during which I explored the field and formulated thoughts, opinions and potential questions. This required attending a variety of fashion related events such as shows, open castings, shoots as well as exploring the field as it is represented in the media. From this, I began to develop my own subjective experiences of the field which combined with past experiences facilitated both personal introspection and a method of questioning. The initiation phase consisted of explaining the nature of my study with cultural intermediaries in my sample. I asked my participants for permission to tape-record the interviews and briefly explained the procedure of the narrative interview.

A further point of importance regarding implementation is that in order to elicit rich narrative, the topic must be of personal and social importance to the participant as well as experiential. To create an attachment between the participant and the topic, I did not begin the initiation phase with the broad opening line suggested by Jones (2002: 2); ‘tell me the story of your life’. For to compile insightful data from a narrative process demands that there be a great deal of trust and rapport between the researcher and the participant (Shankar et al. 2001; Shankar et al. 2009). To establish a rapport with my participants and elicit vivid experiences, I focused on memories, beginning with my own. Memories are integral to a narrative inquiry that attempts to understand the subjective reality of informants. Lieblich et al. (1998: 79) also place a premium on memories describing them as ‘personal creations; they consist of choice, distortions, and inventions of past events in a manner that befits the individual’s current goals, interests, or moods’. Memories obviously can only exist in one’s subconscious as they constitute the habitus (Merleau-Ponty 1969; Bourdieu 1984). In this way, they can be reflected upon and triggered to create a connection between persons.

Furthermore, memories are always emotionally significant even if they do not seem important or relevant to a conscious mind; ‘there are no ‘chance memories’: out of the incalculable number of impressions which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation’ (Adler 1958/1931: 73). I began my narrative inquiries by noting the emotional impact capable of high fashion by recounting the personal experiences as outlined in the preface of this thesis. My descriptive experience very much endeared me to the participants of this study as it forged an emotional connection by virtue of them being cultural intermediaries of high fashion and I, a ‘fashion lover’. Atik and Firat (2013) describe ‘fashion lovers’ as those who crave change and as such their ephemeral consumer behaviour talises the fashion system. This demographic religiously adhere to
changing trends and the necessity to be ‘in fashion’. That is, they use high fashion as a form of expression of aesthetic taste and also for entertainment. They do not desire their identities to remain fixed and so find the chameleonic and expressive capacity offered by high fashion as ‘fun’ (Atik and Firat 2013). To avoid the detrimental ‘passé’, they appropriate all of the various tools provided to them by the fashion system such as window shopping, magazines, fashionable events such as shows etc. The emphasis is therefore always on aspiring to belong at the rarefied vanguard of fashionable taste so that they might experience that which exists behind the pane of glass, as it were.

In re-telling my own narrative during this phase, I was once again transported back to that blisteringly cold night in Paris as the scent from the Chanel atomiser returned to my senses. In the same way as it is written, my story painted a stark contrast between what seemed to be ‘two worlds’, those being objective reality and the model life. In Paris, an animated representation of the model life was being mediated as the fashion models on the inside appeared as evangelists, sent to provoke bot h my belief in and aspiration to this world. My personal narrative served as a prime catalyst for further conversations about our shared emotional experiences with fashion. Moreover, I felt that participants not only related to the emotional impact of my narrative, but also garnered a sense of joy or pride in the enchantment I felt, presumably from having experienced their world. I found this initial conversation to be pivotal to the remainder of the interview process as establishing a bond around the topic facilitated a much easier transition into the questioning phase.

During this time, I translated my thoughts and experiences amassed during the preparation and initiation phases into imminent questions. Given my favouring of a conversational tone over a traditionally styled narrative interview, my questions stimulated a flow of conversation while remaining loosely ‘structured’ to the narrative form. Having started the session with my own subjective experiences (beginning), a series of events (middle) began to unravel involving the communication of beliefs, values and emotions during these and similar experiences. Finally, the conversation organically reaches somewhat of a conclusion (the present). From here, the narrative interview can progress in an attempt to make sense of the various aspects of this conversation. To satisfy this ‘structure’, my personal narrative encouraged participants to speak of their current experiences of high fashion as well as their own memories that have facilitated their affective relationship with the model life.
Following the questioning phase was a concluding talk. This generally consisted of potentially interesting small talk as the interview begins to conclude and the tape-recorder is switched off. During this phase, why-questions are permitted and can prove very important in interpreting the narrative in an overall context. I also treated this phase as a debriefing session. I assumed the interview tape had been erased and began writing everything that could be recalled from the interview such as; feelings, ideas, content and process. A debriefing is essential in order to understand the process of the interview while allowing participants to express their feelings regarding the session. These include further thoughts, possible obstructions etc. The notes that resulted from this session offered a further resource with which to contextualise the untold story of cultural intermediaries and its underlying themes.

3.6 Narrative Analysis: A Holistic/Categorical-Content Perspective

In analysing my research, I declined the use of specialised qualitative data analysis software (e.g. NVivo). While such software offers the benefits of accelerating the process of analysing the material and making it tidier, a manual approach facilitates a more direct, personal and affective engagement with the material. Concerning data analysis, Lieblich et al. (1998:10) observe that ‘narrative research is suitable for scholars who are, to a certain degree, comfortable with ambiguity. They should be able to reach interpretive conclusions –and change and re-change them, when necessary, with further readings’. This necessary ambiguity must be embraced rather than avoided (Lieblich et al. 1998). As an interpretivist, to organise the material with the use of specialist software would compromise interpretations made and ultimately, the essence of this research as a result of creating distance between the researcher and the material.

Given its subjective nature, Bell (2002) questions the presence of suitable criteria of assessment for narrative inquiry. In any event, the method chosen must allow for interpretations that facilitate incremental theory development. Having transcribed the data, I began simultaneously reading other interview texts as well as the work of researchers on similar topics, while then delving back into my own narrative texts with perhaps a new perspective on the themes underpinning the story to be told. To make sense of these themes as they constitute the overall story, I referred to Lieblich et al’s (1998) two-by-two model which delineates potential approaches to narrative analysis (fig. 3.1).
As illustrated above, Lieblich et al. (1998) categorise the narrative analysis of life-stories into four main categories based on two dimensions. ‘Holistic vs. Categorical’ refers to the unit of analysis. It distinguishes whether the narrative is analysed as a whole or in sections. ‘Content vs. Form’ refers to the traditional dichotomy that has always existed in prioritising the meaning conveyed by a story or its structure, plot, use of metaphors etc. From these points, the authors produce four categories of narrative analysis: holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content and categorical-form.

The holistic-content approach focuses on an individual’s entire life story and focuses on the meanings and themes conveyed within it. The meaningful themes that pervade certain aspects of the story are analysed in view of the whole story. Holistic-form examines structure and plot of the narrative and interprets its development based on genre; comedy, romance, tragedy etc. Categorical-content is similar to a ‘content analysis’ in that it extracts specific elements of the story into a defined category for analysis. The final category, categorical-form focuses on various linguistic and stylistic forms such as verbal utterances, metaphors etc. into its analysis. Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that these categories should not be treated as dichotomies but rather,
as continuums. Dependent on the objective of the research being undertaken, narrative analyses
can be said to occupy a middle point in this space rather than distinct end points (Lieblich et
al. 1998).

Given the aims of this study, I have chosen to oscillate between a holistic-content and
categorical-content approach. I argue that further understanding of cultural intermediaries is
best achieved by focusing on the various processes enacted by participants rather than the
linguistic aspects of their narratives. Such is the emphasis placed by this research on content
rather than form. A holistic-content approach mirrors a thematic analysis in that each text is
treated as a whole without de-contextualising these themes from the story (Lichrou et al. 2014).
From this perspective, the various aspects that emerge from intermediaries’ lived experiences
of the high fashion field also connect to the overall theme of the story being told on cultural
mediation (and consequently, the mobilisation of affect).

A categorical approach is taken when the phenomenon being studied is shared by a group of
people (Lieblich et al. 1998). The phenomenon shared by cultural intermediaries is their access
to the model life that derives from their unique capacity to mobilise affect and captivate those
in relation. While categorical-content approaches can de-contextualise elements of the story,
the aim of this work is to allow the themes and animated representations from within each
participant’s story to emerge. Importantly, this must be allowed occur while not overlooking
the relevance of each narrative to the overarching thematic story told by this research. For these
reasons I chose to adopt both a holistic-content and categorical-content approach.

This is not to say that various linguistic episodes were not influential during data analysis.
Often, the theme of the overarching story can be affected by utterances that ‘stand out and
create focus of the reading as a whole’ (Lieblich et al. 1998: 170). Often, these contributed to
my research by creating a prism through which themes could emerge. Although form was not
the central focus of this analysis, many of the narratives developed in a similar manner. For
example, the majority of cultural intermediaries spoke of various moments and experiences
during which they enacted processes of consumption and production, the result of which
legitimated animations of the model life (Chapters Four and Five).

To begin my analysis, I followed the process outlined by Lieblich et al (1998). I first transcribed
my narrative data while paying attention to potential valued points, emerging themes, and
various events consistent with each narrative. The transcription, while labour intensive, was an
important part of the analysis as it allowed for a greater understanding of the material, while
also generating greater insight as regards the interpretation of the text (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). I transcribed the interviews in detail, including various pauses and emphases made at what I deemed significant parts of the discussion. Given the extent of interviews conducted, transcription took approximately three months. While extremely tedious, I found the manual transcription of my data to be rewarding in that it sped up the interpretation process as I was subconsciously interpreting while transcribing.

Having completed this transcription, I began my holistic-content analysis as outlined by Lieblich et al. (1998). I read the material countless times, always carefully, empathetically and openly until certain patterns began to ‘speak’ to me. While there were no clear directions at this point, there were impressions being made as to a potential story. I began to write these impressions taking careful note of the more noticeable features such as contradictions, overlap, or moments of passion in each participant’s story. I produced executive summaries that helped in the initial interpretation of the narratives as a whole. These were categorised into dominant themes, consistent events etc. This proved very interesting from both a research and personal perspective. I compared these summaries with my own initial perceptions and notes taken during the interview process. I discussed these summaries with my supervisors as we strove to interpret emergent themes for each story and an overarching theme(s) across the narratives.

Upon returning to the narrative transcripts, I read the interviews openly and defined the various interrelated content categories/themes that emerged (Lieblich et al. 1998). The primary themes of each interview were marked with different colour markers (Brown et al. 1988) in order to keep track of each one. From here, I assigned separate pieces of each narrative (phrases, sentences etc.) to specific content categories. Each category contained several different narratives from participants. Rather than tabulate the various narrative contributions of my respondents, I used the contents in each category descriptively to portray an image that linked to an overarching theme traversing the narratives and encapsulating my story (Lieblich et al. 1998).

In utilising both a holistic-content and categorical-content approach to analysis, a challenge to interpretation was that participants seldom told their story in a linear manner (Lincoln and Guba 1985). To negotiate this problem, my role as researcher was to actively help the participant to reflect and effectively co-author their biography (Shankar et al. 2001). Rich interpretation was achieved by utilising a method suggested by Ollershaw and Cresswell (2002) described as ‘re-storying’. This involves ‘temporally ordering the events and actions that occurred in the
period of time under study and then interpreting how these story elements relate to one another and contribute to the ending of the story’ (Polkinghorne 2007: 483).

However, ‘re-storying’ also presents ethical implications. Bell (2002: 210) argues that given the multi-layered and ambiguous nature of stories, the researcher is ultimately imposing her/his own meaning onto the lived experience of the participant. In this regard, participants are never free of the researcher’s interpretation of their lives. To negotiate this criticism, I return to the ontological question; ‘what is truth?’ As a researcher, I am a storyteller. I am using the data attained from narrative inquiry to tell my story rather than telling the data’s story. Ultimately, the primary purpose in adopting the narrative method was to delineate a previously untold story of refined consumption and production processes that mobilise affect to frame the consumption experience of the model life and shape bodies’ enduring dispositions toward this end.

Based on this, I created a polyphonic text of individual stories (Kvale 1996) which I initially termed ‘Emerging Narratives from inside The Model Life’, referring to cultural intermediaries’ belonging to this higher reality. I note the word ‘emerging’ here to describe the process of interpretive narrative inquiry as that, which will ultimately remain unfinished (Lieblich et al. 1998). This point is supported by Denzin (1984; 2001:83) who argues that it is important for interpretive research to remain unfinished; ‘All interpretations are unfinished, provisional and incomplete. They start anew when the researcher returns to the phenomenon. This means that interpretation is always conducted from within the hermeneutic circle. As a researcher comes back to an experience and interprets it, his or her prior interpretations and understandings shape what he or she now sees and interprets. This does not mean that interpretation is inconclusive, for conclusions are always drawn. It only means that interpretation is never finished. To think otherwise is to foreclose one’s interpretations before one begins. That is, an individual should not start a research project thinking that he or she will exhaust all that can be known about the phenomenon by the time the project is completed’.

To produce a coherent story, I have separated my data into two main chapters (Chapters Four and Five) with various sub-themes to guide my interpretations. As the researcher is a storyteller, I begin each chapter with my own subjective experiences of the field. In Chapter Four, participants’ stories reflect various ideas and beliefs regarding the model life, and those within its parameters. As noted, its value is aesthetic and extends beyond any practical or rational limitations. Thus, intermediaries’ stories articulate instances during which they both
knowingly and unknowingly enact the artistic ideologies of high fashion/the model life. Participants also speak of various events during which they mediate a connection between bodies (from the perspective of affecting and being affected). During these fashionable events (to which entry is granted based on possessing differential forms of capital), they achieve cultural recognition at the hands of gatekeepers. These instances are a marker of intermediaries’ cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985) and affirm their status as arbiters of taste. In becoming legitimated, they not only reinforce their capital and position in the field, but also further ingrain the attachment felt by bodies the authenticated reality of the model life.

3.7 Conclusion

My aim in choosing a particular methodology was to further understand cultural mediation as those which forges an affective connection with bodies in relation and makes consumption experiences resonate with individuals. Having identified as an interpretivist, I outlined the various ontological, axiological and epistemological assumptions entailed by this perspective. As an interpretivist, I assume that reality is socially constructed and furthermore, negotiated through narrative. The values and beliefs that constitute this reality are not idiosyncratic but rather are socialised through intermediaries’ shared consumption and production processes within a social network (Shankar et al. 2001). Furthermore, the best we can hope to achieve is an understanding rather than the understanding (Denzin 1989) of these mediation processes and the reality that they animate. Yet to shed further light on cultural mediation necessitates the researcher’s personal introspection (Hill et al. 2014) in order to better understand the context being studied and make contributions that extend the scope of interpretive research.

Having outlined these issues, I identified narrative inquiry as the most appropriate methodology by which to address my research aims. Combined with my personal introspection, narrative neatly captures intermediaries’ experiences of the model life. Whether these stories are ‘true’ is irrelevant, as their content provides a window into the consumption experience of high fashion culture. Furthermore, narrative foregrounds memories as a way by which participants represent shared beliefs, values and emotions that contribute to their capacity to act as cultural intermediaries. As a researcher/storyteller, I analysed the emerging data using both a categorical-content and holistic-content perspective (Lieblich et al. 1998). In doing so, I created a polyphonic text entitled ‘Emerging Narratives from inside The Model Life’. The story told conceptualises intermediaries as culturally recognised arbiters of model life who upon being
legitimated, are elevated to a higher reality whereupon they are bestowed with the power to preach the rarefied virtues of the model life to the masses.

3.8 Participant Profiles and Pen Portraits

Accompanying my participant profiles are portraits of each research participant in order to offer a brief insight as to their identities, experiences and positions within the field. In the interest of ethical anonymity, I have provided each participant with a pseudonym rather than use his or her real name. All other information remains unadjusted.

Figure 3-3: Models’ Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Recent Campaigns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>25</td>
<td><em>Chanel, Chopard, Richard Mile</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arran</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Van Cleef &amp; Arpels</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>De Beer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot</td>
<td>19</td>
<td><em>Urban Outfitters, Carhartt, G-Star Raw</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henrik</td>
<td>20</td>
<td><em>Burberry, Marc Jacobs, Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue Homme</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>22</td>
<td><em>En Noir, Libertine, Dazed and Confused</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Ovadia &amp; Sons, Sibling</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Burberry, Hermes Paris, Michael Bastian</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Hunter</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td><em>Celine, Chloe, Bally</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>Tim Coppens, Public School, Frank &amp; Oak, Billy Reid</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Pierre Balmain, H&amp;M, Gucci, Armani, Fillippa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>iD, Dazed and Confused, Carbon Copy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>27</td>
<td><em>Prada, Gucci, Tom Ford</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>22</td>
<td><em>Buerberry, Trussard Eyewear, Versace Jeans, Client</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Subway</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Rag &amp; Bone, Levi’s, Ray Bans</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>Grey Goose, Hennessy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>26</td>
<td><em>Calvin Klein, Diesel, Levis, Cross, Paco Robanne</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Models’ Pen Portraits:

‘Ben’ is 25 years old and is approaching the end of his modelling career. While he has had some success on several luxury campaigns for *Chanel*, *Chopard* and *Richard Mille*, these have all been wristwatch campaigns. While he has remained editorial due to these campaigns, he has sustained himself mostly by working on commercial campaigns although these do not appear on his portfolio. His lack of variability and striking presence has left him rather cynical as to the high fashion industry.

‘Arran’ is 18 and is just beginning his journey in modelling. Although he has limited experience in terms of campaigns and editorials, he is in the process of amassing a credible and versatile book by which to promote his look at castings. He has also just been selected to walk for *Van Cleef & Arpels* at their show in Paris.

‘Arthur’ is also 18 and has already been having some success both editorially and campaign wise. He is a good friend with ‘Arran’ and they were both ‘discovered’ during London Fashion Week twelve months ago. His most notable booking thus far has been in a campaign for *De Beer* jewellery wherein he accompanied a female model who was wearing the female line.

‘Elliot’, 19 from central London was discovered while clubbing with friends. While still attempting to break into luxury fashion, the majority of his jobs have been modelling urban street wear brands such as *Urban Outfitters*, *Carhartt* and *G-Star Raw*. He has been told by bookers that his look does not quite correspond to luxury fashion.

‘Henrik’ is 20, originally from Sweden but is now permanently living in London as a full time model. He was discovered when in Heathrow airport as he was embarking on a two week holiday with his family in London. Upon being approached, he spent much of the holiday getting test shots done for his book, learning to walk properly, going to fittings. Having such faith in his potential, the agency signed him before he went back to Stockholm and having graduated high school, immediately moved back to London. He is now currently signed to *Models 1* in London, *MIKAs* in Stockholm and *Scoop Models* in Copenhagen. The similar circumstances by which Kate Moss was discovered have stimulated a strong motivation and sense of belonging in ‘Henrik’.

‘Jacob’ is 22 and signed to *Premier* Agency in London. His look corresponds to that of grungy, edgy high fashion as he has several tattoos and appears to embody the hedonistic lifestyle that has come to be sensationalised in the media. He is becoming increasingly successful of late.
however having just booked to open the *En Noir* and *Libertine* shows for London Fashion Week ‘14 as well as featuring on the cover of *Dazed and Confused* Magazine January 2014.

‘Noel’ is 24 and having struggled for some time to break into high fashion, he has developed a close working relationship with brands *Ovadia & Sons* as well as *Sibling*. While he does not appear to ‘fit’ with the luxury of brands such as Tom Ford or Gucci, his walk and look are a perfect match for those high fashion knitwear brands and the slouchy, oversized trend of the moment.

‘Ryan’, 24, has also had a great deal of success in the high fashion scene. Having said this, his success has constituted more quality rather than quantity. Premium Models in Paris, Elite Models in London and Wilhelmina in New York currently represent him. He is an avid believer in the rewards and merits of the model life particularly having begun his modelling career with the *Burberry* 2008 S/S campaign. From here he has ventured on to further success as a regular fixture at Marc Jacobs’ fashion shows as well as walking for *Michael Bastian* and a brief campaign for *Hermes Paris* F/W 2013.

‘Simon’, 18, is originally from Manchester was discovered in the Trafford Centre in Manchester just over one year ago. He was discovered by a brand ambassador for *Hunter* footwear and has thus spent the majority of his short career working on their campaigns and editorial advertisements.

‘Travis’ is 21, from Dublin. He has been living in London for the last year since he was discovered. He spends the majority of his time attending castings for high fashion brands attempting to get work. There are concerns regarding his versatility and ability to lead a campaign. The majority of work which he has been part of has been for female brands such as *Celine*, *Chloe* and *Bally* with his role as an accompaniment to the female model(s).

‘Tom’, 23, is from Greater London and is praised most of all for his walk rather than his photogenic appeal. The majority of his work stems from walking in fashion shows and is a regular fixture at Fashion Weeks in London, Paris and New York. Based predominantly in London, he has walked in shows for brands such as *Tim Coppens*, *Public School*, *Frank & Oak* and *Billy Reid*.

‘Matt’ is 24 from Canning Town, London. He is good pals with his self-confessed ‘partner in crime’, ‘Jacob’ and shares his hedonistic views on his occupation as well as the ‘you either have it or you don’t’ mentality. Currently signed to *Premier* model agency, he has worked on

‘Henry’ is a young model (18) who appears to be taken under the wing of ‘Matt’ and ‘Jacob’. Having being showered with praise as to his potential based on his portfolio, he is struggling slightly with his walk that must be improved if he is to make the coveted selection for upcoming Fashion Week in London and potentially Paris. The strength of his photogenic appeal has seen him earn his initial stripes on editorial campaigns for Michael Kors as well as in magazines such as iD, Dazed and Confused and on the cover of Carbon Copy.

‘David’ is 27 and reportedly in the twilight of his modelling career. After having a rather successful career in editorial campaigns and runway shows for prestigious brands among them Prada, Gucci and Tom Ford, ‘ David’ has been increasingly seek work closer to the commercial market brands in order to make money.

‘Clark’ is 22 and also signed to prestigious high fashion agency Models 1 in London as well as 2morrow Model in Milan and DNA Models in New York. His recent campaigns include Burberry F/W 2013, Trussard Eyewear S/S 2014, Versace Jeans, and the cover of Client Style Guide in CLIENT Magazine October 2012.

‘Sean’ is an 18 year old Irish model who currently belongs to Compton Models in Ireland yet is unsigned to an agency in London. He dreams of making it to London in the world of high fashion yet currently finds himself at an impasse given his physical frame which is more suited to the commercial market which he is unhappy with.

‘Jon’ is 18 and also from London. There is a strong lineage of luxury fashion in Jon’s family as he neighbours and best friends with a prominent booker in Premier modelling agency and was subsequently signed by them when he turned 18. His mother was also a successful model while his father was a tailor and show designer. His youth was spent attending fashion shows and waiting in rooms colouring in fashion magazines while waiting for his mother to finish her shoots, shows etc.

‘Mark’ is 23 from Dublin and was discovered in a nightclub in Liverpool on his birthday. The major campaigns he has been selected for a mostly alcohol brands such as Grey Goose Vodka and Hennessy as well as walking a runway show for J.Crew.
‘Liam’ is 26 and is primarily a denim-wear model. His unique look has made him a permanent fixture for brands attempting to portray a subcultural image such as Calvin Klein, Levis, Diesel and Cross denim-wear. He has also worked on a fragrance campaign for Paco Rabanne in F/W 2011.

Figure 3-4: Bookers’ Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Models 1</td>
<td>Senior booker/editorial market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lars</td>
<td>Models 1</td>
<td>Junior booker/commercial market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Premier</td>
<td>Senior booker/ ‘future faces’ section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Premier</td>
<td>Director of scouting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bookers’ Pen Portraits:

‘Peter’ is a booker who spent some time in New York in the marketing department of DKNY. Having learned the ins and outs of fashion during his four years here, he moved to London to work for British Vogue as a contributor. Since then he has moved into agency work and now works at a prestigious agency as a senior booker for the high end editorial section.

‘Lars’ is 31 and was born in Denmark. He is himself a former professional model having worked on campaigns for Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and Gap. He now works in the same agency as ‘Peter’ although is a junior booker and specialises in the more commercial market.

‘Suzanne’ is a ‘future faces’ senior which essentially means that as she describes it, her office is the street. She rarely spends much time in the confines of the actual office as she is constantly looking for the next ‘face’. When asked about her favourite part of working in this industry she replied ‘I do something that few people understand and fewer still can do’.

‘Pamela’ is director of scouting at a reputable agency also based in London. She began her career at London College of fashion studying fashion promotion before getting an internship with a model agency. From here she worked her way through the ranks until she eventually became director of scouting, a position she has held for the last seven years.
## Designers’ Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Debut Collection</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom R</td>
<td>LFW 2012</td>
<td>London College of Fashion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>New York 2007</td>
<td>Parsons School of Design, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>London 2013</td>
<td>West End Theatre, London</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Designers’ Pen Portraits:

‘Tom R’ is an up and coming designer who studied at the London College of Fashion for four years; he developed his final year assignment into a collection which he debuted at London Fashion Week in 2012. Since then he has won several awards and regularly goes back to London College of Fashion to present lectures.

‘Robert’ grew up in New York where he studies at Parsons School of Design. His mother was also a fashion designer who owned a popular boutique in the Soho area of New York. He was inspired from an early age to become a designer after he saw how ladies that frequented his mother’s store became emotional upon seeing their reflection in the mirror wearing her beautiful designs.

‘Jonny’ is a young avant-garde designer who claims he dropped out of design school as he found what they were teaching ‘boring’. Instead he got an apprenticeship with a tailor in the fashionable Saville Row district in London. From here he began to offer his suggestions for designs and began tinkering with materials and fabrics until he eventually developed his first collection in 1999.

‘Adele’ is an Irish designer who studied fashion at Central St. Martins in London. While still young, her designs have been receiving greater attention in recent months. In the next six months she hopes to sell her collection to a larger brand that matches her design sensibilities. Until then she makes ends meet by working in her friend’s jewellery shop.

‘Nicholas’ also contends that he never strictly went to design school but instead worked for years as a makeshift costume designer in a shoddy theatre off the West End. At a party after a
particularly bad show, a person in the crowd who happened to be a designer asked who had made the costumes. Upon exchanging details, Nicholas embarked on an apprenticeship as a designer of high fashion.

**Figure 3-6: Stylists’ Participant Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Campaigns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Central St. Martins</td>
<td>Internship with <em>Alexander McQueen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nic</td>
<td>‘None’</td>
<td>Didn’t specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>London College of Fashion</td>
<td>Sales Assistant at <em>Dior</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stylists’ Pen Portraits:**

‘Clare’ is an accomplished stylist who studies fashion design and trend analysis at Central St. Martins in London. Having graduated she undertook an internship with Alexander McQueen. Her dedication to her craft has made her a very popular freelance stylist with some of the most exclusive brands in London.

‘Nic’ is a young stylist whom I met at a rather small fashion show during London Fashion Week. When asked about his career trajectory, he provided me with a story that was very similar to that of Kate Moss’ discover by Sarah Doukas.

‘Christian’ is a freelance stylist who works at fashion shows and shoots. His main income is garnered from working as a sales assistant at the Dior store in Covent Garden.

**Figure 3-7: Photographers’ Participant Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Campaigns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>London College of Fashion</td>
<td>Photographer for <em>Phoenix Magazine</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>Trinity College, Dublin</td>
<td>Winner of ‘Amateur Photographer of the Year 2012’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Brooklyn College- CUNY</td>
<td><em>British Vogue, i-D, Harper’s Bazaar</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘James’ is a photographer for *Phoenix* magazine who has always had a love of fine art. Having dabbled in photography for several years he started to take it seriously after he turned 17 and
his dad bought him a state of the art camera for Christmas. He went on to study it in university and has been working at avant-fashion magazine Phoenix since.

‘Miles’ strictly works at a modelling agency while also working as a photographer at agency related events. He is heavily involved in scouting models and is never without a Polaroid camera. In 2012, he won the ‘Amateur Photographer of the Year’, a prestigious competition in the UK. While he enjoys working at the agency, he dreams of being a high fashion photographer like his idol, Mario Testino.

‘Fiona’ is a very accomplished photographer who has shot for covers such as British Vogue, i-D magazine, the Edit, Institute and Harpers Bazaar. She has also worked with a handful of celebrities. While achieving great success in New York in her younger days, she eventually moved back to London where she started a family. She still contributes to the high fashion industry and now works as a consultant for editorial brands.
4. Narratives of Consecration

Now from his host of sons,  
a thousand strong, the father woke up Morpheus,  
the master mimic, who was skilled in imitating human shapes.  
No other Dream can match his artistry in counterfeiting men.  
None was cleverer than he at reproducing a way of walking, an expression,  
the sound of a voice. In addition, he used words and wore the clothes  
most typical of each person.  

Ovid XI: 454.

4.1 Introduction

Over the countless years of visiting London, for one reason or another, I have never felt like a tourist given the multicultural nature of the city. Yet during fashion week, as I shuffle around Covent Garden, I feel more like an alien than a tourist. Given that we have all been tourists at one time, we tend to recognise the shared commonalities they embody; the leisurely stroll, the peering up at buildings, around corners or into the distance. However, I do not recognise aspects of myself in these people who cross the cobbles of Covent Garden. They are purposeful but leisurely, as though they have to be somewhere urgently yet, have all the time in the world to get there. My appearance, mannerisms and form contrast greatly with the majority. The way they interact with one another is somehow different. It is as though they are aware they are being watched. Each face embodies a unique quality of difference that provokes my interest, making me stare. I am truly in the minority. Moments later, my suspicions are confirmed as I hear ‘Suzanne’, a lady whom I have never met in person; call my name from a nearby table.

Suzanne: Hmmm, how would I describe the look? It is everything, it’s their whole persona. It’s that ‘certain something’ that a person has that makes a glance turn into a stare... that special quality. And I’m not trying to be vague or speak in generalities with you. For a model, their look defines everything they do, but also, everything they do defines their ‘look’. The way they photograph, his attitude, the conversation he has while the photographer changes the lighting, how he stands, walks, speaks, smiles, his favourite restaurant, how he chews his food, the tip he leaves, the type of drink he buys, his one night stands, more importantly the girls he dates, his relationship with his mother, his favourite book, favourite film, favourite brand of toilet paper. It all becomes absorbed into his look. Your look is you, and you are your look. It’s that simple.

Referring to the ‘whole person’ (Mears 2011), the look is best described as the embodiment of culturally valorised beliefs and rare stylistic consumption practices. In high fashion, the look is a ne ephemeral standard against which fashionable a gents a re continuously judged. F or
cultural intermediaries, stylised patterns of consumption and production commodify appearance but also, persona. This develops a look that contains unique and subtle features which differentiate those considered ‘in fashion’ from the passé. As this chapter will illustrate, the impact felt upon engagement with a unique look invokes an intense emotional response in bodies. The look is therefore an object of significant cultural value in high fashion and encompasses the embodied, affective aspects of ‘beauty’, in that bodies in relation feel its affective capacity. Furthermore, the unique capacity of the look invests the consumption experience with affect during mediation by diffusing its expressive properties to an audience.

These properties are ‘associations the subject makes with previous objects and experiences, engaging the memory, imagination, and affective capacity. The expressive properties have an escapist character— they create value in the form of ‘distinct worlds’, in which consumers can become involved, without incurring any of the costs of real encounters’ (Wagner 1999: 130). The aesthetic experience induced by contagion upon engagement with a look suffused with affect becomes ‘central to a life of higher order; that is, aesthetic experience is distinguished from the material aspects of life and privileged because of its importance in human development and metaphysical discourse’ (Venkatesha and Mamber 2006: 20). To further articulate this idea as it applies to intermediaries’ consumption and production processes, I have divided this chapter into four sections based on the significant themes that have arisen from my analysis.

4.2 ‘Something few understand, and even fewer still can do…’

Cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect captures attention and in the creation of an emotional connection, shapes the tastes, motives and experiences of the subject (Mothersill 1984; Goldman 1995). The impact made triggers bodies’ recognition of and identification with the ‘dream’ embodied by the intermediary. Their affective capacity rekindles past emotions and experiences within bodies that then become as sociated with the aesthetic object or consumption experience (Turner and Poppel 1988). This increases the viewer’s engagement with the imagined subject position and produces an ‘intensely meaningful and rich experience’ (Goldman 1995: 346). For intermediaries, the value derived from the aesthetic experience is consecratory in that it endows the producers of the experience with a mark of distinction (Bourdieu 1984; 1985). As illustrated below, even vicarious experience of these consecratory moments are appropriated by intermediaries to preserve this distinction. In doing so, they
signify their understanding of high fashion’s ‘magical’ code and subsequent belonging to its ‘distinct world’ (Wagner 1999).

Lars: In 1988, Sarah Doukas was in JFK airport waiting to board her flight back to London. While waiting in the queue, she noticed a 14 year old girl with her family waiting to board the flight. The young girl was not a traditional beauty by any means but she looked ‘different’. She had this natural, magnetic charisma. During the flight, Doukas asked her business partner and brother to walk down the aisle and approach the girl who was sat next to her family. He returned to his seat and informed Doukas that the girl’s name was Kate Moss. And that day, fashion changed forever.

PL: What do you think made Kate stand out in a crowded airport?

Pamela: It’s impossible to define the moment, you just have it or you don’t. But that’s the magic of high fashion…we do something few understand, and even fewer still can do…She just embodied this fashionable revolution against the commercial, traditionally beautiful ‘supermodels’ like Cindy Crawford, Christy Turlington and Elle Macpherson who dominated the fashion runways at the time. Fashion had become boring, it was going stale but Kate rejuvenated it with a new excitement and vitality. Compared to these women, Moss was so…‘different’. She was far more interesting to look at. Those other models…we’d seen beauty like it before but not like Kate. She turned the entire fashion industry on its head.

Suzanne: Yeah, she was just so special. I mean she’s essentially a dwarf in model terms; she’s only 5’10” but had this enigmatic aura that captivated Sarah on sight. She embodies the spirit of London fashion. She is the most imperfect, perfect girl you’ve ever laid eyes on…when you speak with her, she is so unassuming but you feel her wave of charisma wash over you. She is just incomparable.

These narratives represent epiphanic moments (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) during which the ideologies of high fashion are reinforced through the consecration of the subject that embodies them (Moss). For example, the description of high fashion as ‘magic’ implies a code which only those with the requisite cultural capital can decipher; ‘we do something few understand, and even fewer still can do’. As a field of restricted production (Bourdieu 1985), the cultural values produced by high fashion ‘do not come from nowhere; they are generated internally in the field of production itself’ (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006: 30). High fashion is a field of competition for cultural legitimacy that is bestowed upon continual consecrations; ‘it follows that a complete definition of the mode of restricted production must include not only those institutions which ensure the production of competent consumers, but also those which produce agents capable of renewing it’ (Bourdieu 1985: 23).

Intermediaries reproduce the cultural rarity of the field by searching for ‘culturally pertinent features endowed with value’ (Bourdieu 1985: 19). In this particular instance, the discovery of Kate Moss was culturally significant as it heralded a change in the fashionable aesthetic of the time and a shift to a more anarchic perception of beauty. Traditional depictions were becoming...
stale, as cultural intermediaries such as Doukas perceived the industry as on the precipice of change. The esoteric appeal embodied by Moss combined with her careful nurture at the hands of Doukas and other intermediaries brought high fashion back from the brink of the profane and patched the veil of mystique behind which it still operates (particularly since the latest discovery and heir to Moss’ legacy, Cara Delevingne).

Furthermore, as an arbiter of taste, Doukas’ capacity to recognise the mysterious quality or ‘je ne sais quoi’ embodied by Moss conferred her with greater cultural capital, and reaffirmed her position of belonging to this world; ‘taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier’ (Bourdieu 1984: 6). Those in the field embrace the affective change in disposition induced by these revelatory moments. The affirmation of distinction through recognition and embodiment of these values elevates intermediaries of high fashion to a hidden world (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) where consumption occupies a mantle beyond the satisfaction of need or function. In this example, the story of Moss’ ‘discovery’ and subsequent consecration is described in a miraculous tone.

Suzanne: You just know...as soon as you see them. There is no humming and hawing that takes place first. You become completely seduced by their energy. You don’t feel the same anymore, you feel different in your body for that moment...In many ways it’s like an out of body experience. I mean, I don’t want to sound like when you see the right model that the whole world makes sense and we’re due for eternal happiness. But, in this little bubble of fashion, spotting the right model can have seismic consequences. You can just feel it, your bones rattle! Like, finding the next Kate Moss, Cara Delevingne... Cole Mohr or... Ash Stymest...they can change your way of looking at life.

Lars: A find like Kate is a needle in a haystack. There are very few models like her anymore. It’s impossible to explain when you look at someone like that. People like Kate, Cara, Ash, and Suki...they have this ethereal quality that wakes you from a stupor of monotony and ordinariness. They’re the special ones. The just emit this radiance that makes everything else...inmaterial. It’s magical.

Based on these descriptions, the look appears as ‘an embodied tension between two standards of excellence: on the one hand, it conforms to general standards of perfection- a generically perfect body and personality; on the other, a look sets a model apart as special and different from the rest- a distinctive body and personality. The look embodies this contradictory twin imperative for sameness and difference, to fit in and stand out’ (Mears 2011:119). Furthermore, the cultural scarcity prized by this restricted field thus stems from intermediaries’ capacity to embody an ‘affecting presence’; an ear being with its unique ‘personality’ continuously exerting its own existence, though it is known only in transaction.

25 ‘Fit in’ in this instance as Parmentier & Fischer (2013) doesn’t refer to fitting in with the consumer but rather fitting in with a fashionably elite group of cultural intermediary.
It is independent of any source of ‘meaning’ or energy external to itself; being a self-sufficient entity, it is its own ‘meaning’ and provides its own energy (Armstrong 1971: 29).

The intensity evoked by affecting presence or look, possesses ‘an ethereal quality that wakes you from a stupor of monotony and ordinariness’. Moss’ consecration at the hands of Doukas is described as something akin to transubstantiation (Bourdieu 1984). This refers to the transformation and subsequent endowment of a particular subject with “special powers”, or various forms of capital that have an influential effect on individuals. This offers a new alternative with which to understand the significance of what cultural intermediaries do. Their shared, distinctive degree of capital that manifests through consumption and production reinforces the ‘value of the work, or which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work’ (Bourdieu 1993: 37). In other words, by remaining open to the affective energies that pervade the atmosphere, cultural arbiters mediate the belief that transubstantiation has occurred. That is, models’ ineffable mobilisation of affect triggers a response from tastemakers that leads to their consecration. The ethereal or ‘magical’ experience elevates those affected to ‘the dream world of imaginary beings’ (Rocamora 2002: 350). As the narrative above illustrates, there is an ardent belief that upon being consecrated, Moss was transformed from a young girl from Croydon, to a high fashion deity who would lead the revolution that was about to take place.

To further emphasise this belief, Moss is depicted as an ethereal beauty that exudes magical incomparability. Since then, her enduring affective persona has been deified through various productive relationships with tastemakers of high fashion. As illustrated in the passage above, the cultural capital endowed upon consecration grants her further affective capacity with which to enchant others. Consecration therefore charges intermediaries with the capacity to circulate intensified affective energies amongst a social network. In doing so, the consumption experience itself is transubstantiated from something akin to the material world and legitimated as belonging to a transcendent reality; the model life. As an intermediary, to signify belonging to this distinct world is to embrace its rarity and unique conceptions of beauty. Within the data, a clear distinction is made between the values and beliefs held by intermediaries of high fashion compared to the contrasting ideologies of commercial fashion.

26 In this case, aspiring models or as the narrative would suggest, ‘special’ individuals with an innate affective capacity such as Moss.
27 Upon being discovered, she quickly established a relationship with Corinne Bailey, a renowned photographer and influential arbiter of taste.
Pamela: Commercial fashion is just vulgar. That’s all it is. I don’t mean to come across pretentious or anything but it is a million miles away from what I consider ‘fashion modelling’. I don’t even consider commercial models ‘models’ to be honest. They are just guys with big muscles and bigger egos. And girls with boobs and cellulite where they’re brains should be. They can’t model. They are paid to stand beside a sign on the high street in the hope that some equally vapid sap will pass by and pick up a flyer you know? It’s those attention whores in the nightclub, shirt off, ignorantly big muscles, bow tie a round neck, o r a bra and knickers o r w hatever p ouring s ome c heap promotional drink down a wasted student’s throat while all their drunken friends gawp with their jaws on the floor. It’s like really bad porn to me. It’s just so tacky.

There are points made here which retain high fashion’s distinction from the market. For instance, the ‘vulgarity’ conveyed by commercial fashion derives from underlying consumerist ideologies that treat consumption as a financial transaction rather than an aesthetic experience. Further to this, commercial fashion’s accessibility and mass market appeal negates any potential for rarity and hence, cultural legitimacy. Its ‘vapid’, ‘tacky’ nature suggests a brutish lack of intelligence in a context that is void of artistic substance. Its description as ‘really bad porn’ enlists a sexualised theme that is brash and obvious, rather than the subtle, seductive qualities embodied by high fashion. Through their consumption and production processes, arbiters of taste seek to preserve a separation between these two worlds. High fashion preserves its illusory appeal and distinction from commercial traits primarily through the evocation of rarity (Bourdieu 1985).

Lars: True fashion models are rare. And they should be rare. To say you are actually a fashion model is a big deal. That you have been able to make it at this level and have such an influence on so many people? That’s a big deal. That should be recognised and rewarded. But the problem these days is that every Tom, Dick and Harry is calling themselves models. The amount of pretentious assholes that I see in bars and clubs. ‘What do you do?’ ‘Oh I’m a model’. ‘Let me guess, you wore some half priced clothes at a charity fashion show and had your cousin take some pictures of you with your shirt off which you then uploaded on Facebook in a new album titled ‘Modelling Snaps’. Give me a break, I can tell even by the way you said ‘I’m a model’ that you are not a model. Yes you’re a very beautiful person, but beauty without depth is just decoration. And so like many others, you’re a pretender, and that’s fine, most of the guys out there are. And the very best of luck to you. But… sometimes though… in my more gentle moments, I worry for those guys, like… do you really think you’re a model man? Please don’t pin your hopes on this delusion that you’re someone you’re not.

As noted, to belong within the parameters of the model life demands of the intermediary a unique set of cultural, embodied, emotional, social and symbolic capital (Parmentier and Fischer 2007). Rarity is a quality that has long been associated with fields of restricted production (Bourdieu 1985), including high fashion (Parmentier and Fischer 2011; Joy et al. 2014). The evocation of rarity infuses the consumption experience with aesthetic value due to the scarcity of requisite cultural capital (Bourdieu 1985) with which to decipher high fashion’s coded avant-garde and ‘magical’ appeal. As such, tastemakers already existing within this
world must preserve it. The epiphanic moment in which a model is ‘discovered’ or consecrated is an example of such. During these moments, tastemakers’ recognition is commanded by the culturally scarce, affecting presence of a look and a subsequent affective response is provoked. The (non)rationa
ilisation of this process as inexplicable or ‘magic’ further legitimises those on the inside as possessing a unique disposition and special powers. It also legitimates high fashion as distinct from economic value and the market.

Furthermore, as a field of restricted production, conceptions of aesthetic value are unique to high fashion (Bourdieu 1985). Rather than conform to traditional beauty ideals, high fashion foregrounds a photogenic appeal that veers toward the slightly ‘weird’, ‘edgy’, ‘ugly’, ‘hard featured’, ‘striking’ and ‘unique’ type of appearance (Entwistle 2009; Mears 2011; Entwistle and Wissinger 2012). In the above passage for example, high fashion is made to appear distinct from commercial pursuits that focus on superficial appearance; ‘beauty without depth is just decoration’. ‘Depth’ permeates beyond surface appearance to include persona; ‘clusters of images or symbols [that] may constitute a archetype of fiction deeply embedded in the consumer imagination’ (Dion and Arnould 2011:503). The word persona is also, conveniently the Latin word for ‘mask’ (Jaeger 2011: 31).

While appearance can be viewed, ‘depth’ connotes an affective capacity from within that must be felt upon engagement. As mentioned, this necessitates rare cultural capital to decipher. The scarce, extraordinary qualities embodied by the high fashion look are ‘meant to appeal to the high-end fashion consumer and other elite producers; they are a wink and a nod to each other’s cultural competencies to appreciate coded avant-garde beauty’ (Mears 2011:29). Embodiment of these values endows arbiters of taste with further cultural value and distinction (Bourdieu 1984; 1985) while those outside these parameters are not meant to make sense of this unique aesthetic (Mears 2011). ‘Depth’ is referenced further in the passage below. Again, positioning the consumerist ideologies of commercial fashion as manipulative makes a distinction between the two worlds.

Pamela: Traditional beauty is passé. Commercial is boring. There’s no value in it. These commercial models, they are not interesting to look at. I am forever looking at gorgeous boys and girls in magazines advertising fashion brands and it’s just so passé. I don’t feel anything when I look at it you know? Only boredom. High fashion models are completely different. I don’t want to be disrespectful and say they are ‘weird’ looking but, they are just freakishly photogenic! They don’t look like your typical person. They are not beautiful or ugly. They exist in some other realm of aesthetic description. They don’t adhere to the usual complimentary adjectives. They are beyond that, the presence of a high fashion model is meant to just take a hold of you and shake you. They are models you know? You’re not supposed to get tired of looking at a fashion model because every time you look at them, you see something
else that you didn’t notice before. Something else pulls you in. You feel alive! It’s like staring at a piece of art or something. It really is. You get a great emotional vibe from the whole experience. But with commercial models, I just see a gorgeous face beside a bottle of cologne. It’s just trying to sell me a fragrance. It’s so obvious. They just want my money. It’s so corporate. Just so basic. Standard. Bland.

The above narrative illustrates how unique aesthetic parameters are manufactured around the coded values of high fashion in an attempt to distance its ideologies from that of traditional commerce. Contrasting to the boring look of commercial fashion, I interpret being emotionally ‘shaken’ upon contact with a high fashion look affirms its status as ‘magic’ or ‘art’; terms used to describe the response to non-rational intensities that can only be felt. Indeed, the purpose of art is to invoke emotions and feelings of pleasure in audiences (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). Viewers are made to ‘feel alive’ upon experiencing it. Moreover, artist Oryeya G asset believed that the purpose of art was to completely disavow any similarity to that which is ‘human’ i.e. generic, or binary, mundane etc. Instead, its purpose is to purify the soul by allowing people to experience the sublime (Bourdieu 1984). In this sense, the high fashion look is one that conveys spiritual and ‘pure’ intensities (Bourdieu 1985).

The encroachment of artistic ideologies into everyday encounters (Schroeder 2002) creates an illusion of distance from corporate ideologies and separation from lived experiences of reality. Those who embody these ideologies are felt to exist in an ethereal world of alternate aesthetic description (Habermas 1984). Further to this point, Habermas (1984) describes art as a provocateur of non-cognitive, non-rational experiences that in evoke in tensified feeling in individuals. Thus, the cultural mediation and legitimation of these ideologies does not necessarily replace, but rather, disguises the presence of commerce and economic exchange in high fashion. One of the main ways by which arbiters of taste create this distinction is through the consecration of looks with unique affective capacity, rather than traditional beauty. In this sense, the high fashion look conforms to the ‘the beauty world reversed’ (Mears 2011:43) in that its rarity affirms intermediaries’ belonging to the model life and confers them with valuable cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1984).

4.3 ‘A vulgar, crass cesspool of tasteless fodder…’

The above section notes how the aesthetic value conferred upon the fashion model and consumption experience elevates both beyond the corporate pursuits of everyday life to a more appealing life. Imbued with ‘magical’ qualities, arbiters of taste mediate an ardent belief (held by those within the model life) that ‘something more’ is occurring. In other words, consumption that would otherwise be regarded as materialistic is driven by ‘pure’ intentions (Bourdieu
That is, it is not based on economic exchange (Willis 1991). Taste, and cultural intermediaries’ capacity to shape the aesthetic sensibilities of audiences is therefore crucial if the underlying commercialism of high fashion remain hidden beneath a layer of magic and artistry. To do this demands that intermediaries position their look as that of a consecrated, aesthetic object (Bourdieu 1984; 1985; Parmentier and Fischer 2007) whose image is ethereal and impact enduring.

Thus, the look diffused by the restricted field of high fashion is considered ‘pure’, ‘abstract’ and ‘esoteric’ (Bourdieu 1985). By this, I infer that it is one that must capture attention and recognition while retaining the cultural rarity inherent in anonymity. For instance, Kate Moss was considered “pure” by virtue of her discovery. Her look is also deemed esoteric based on her distinction between traditional models of that particular time. It also demands specific aesthetic sensibilities (cultural capital) to perceive and enjoy. Thus, as intermediaries’ of the model life, models must simultaneously ‘fit in’ and ‘stand out’ within the parameters of this world; ‘as actors embedded in the field of fashion, models must express their adherence to the logic of art by conveying field conforming taste through the embodied practices of self-presentation’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2013:382). As art commands greater cultural value than commerce (McRobbie 2003), embodiment of these abstract or ‘weird’ attributes are consecrated and affirmed as legitimate (Bourdieu 1993: 1985). High fashion’s attachment to artistic principles (Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014) produces culturally coded and valorised experiences, the ‘depth’ of which, extends beyond the primitive world of commercial desires. Upon attending a fitting, I made further interpretations as to the extent of this ‘depth’.

The intermediaries I spoke with exerted a profound belief in the authenticity of the model life and the ideologies that constitute it.

Henrik: I’m not being paid for this show, none of us are. It works different in here, it’s about something more. If you want to get paid lots of money you’d be better off flogging toothpaste or something. It’s not really about the money at all. I mean, commercial models earn a lot of money but what does that money allow them to do that the same money earned from working in McDonalds wouldn’t? It’s the same money. Ok, there’s better job security in commercial fashion… there’s job security in McDonalds too. I mean nothing against people who work in McDonalds but why don’t any of us want to work there? They’ll pay you too. We sacrifice the money because we are afraid of what others will think. Because we are afraid that one day someone we know or… the person we’re mad about will walk in, see us in the polyester uniform, hair net, the sweat, and smell of grease…that’s it fucked. Oh well, at least I’m getting paid? Nah, it’s fucked pal.’

28 Fittings are occasions during which models that have been selected to walk in a show arrive to get ‘fitted’ for the designs to be showcased.
Describing high fashion as ‘something more’ reproduces the ethereal spirit of the model life. It also preserves its distance from the world of commerce, embodied in this instance by an organisation at the pinnacle of commercialisation; *McDonalds*. The belief in money as somewhat irrelevant crucially separates high fashion from bearing the most fundamental, shared commonality of most cultures; the belief that financial capital is necessary for survival. By negating any attachment to this necessity, I interpret that those belonging to this world receive their nutrition from a higher source. This further enshrouds the model life as an artistic and spiritual construct, the purpose of which is to provide stimulation, liberation and emotional enrichment. Towards the end of the narrative, the importance of visibility is mentioned. Intermediaries’ visibility must be contained within the rarefied confines of the model life (Parmentier and Fischer 2007) or risk the codes to its cultural rarity and legitimacy being exposed (Bourdieu 1985). As noted by Sally Field, chief contributor to *Vogue*; ‘it’s cooler to walk down the street and have only the people who should know you. It makes you part of this super-cool club’ (Singer 2004: 748). An imperative for intermediaries of high fashion then is to seek recognition and notoriety rather than fame and celebrity (Parmentier and Fischer 2007).

Matt: Some models are in it because they want to be famous but generally they don’t last very long. They get found out. Others just gravitate toward celebrity and in the end, they get caught between fame and being a model and ultimately end up without a pot to piss in. But not like...Kate Moss...or Cara Delevingne...or Jarrod Scott. There is a difference between being iconic and being a celebrity. These models are iconic because they still retain a certain mystique about them. Others model because really, they want to be celebrities...like George Craig.

PL: Who’s George Craig?

Ryan: He used to be a model. He’s more a celebrity now though.

Henry: He still works [as a model] though doesn’t he?

Ryan: Maybe he does but he’s not a model, is he Henry? He’s a fucking celebrity who goes out with Hermione out of Harry Potter.

Henry: Emma Watson? No, I think he’s with Diana Vickers now actually.

Matt: How do you know so much about it then? Been reading *OK! Magazine* again have you? Gossip queen! Who’s this Diana girl anyway?

Henry: Diana Vickers? She’s a singer isn’t she? That girl from *X-Factor*.

Ryan: Ah, fuck sake, just stop…

To explain the contempt felt by both Ryan and Matt, George Craig is a 23 year old English model and musician. He was ‘discovered’ at an independent music gig that his band was playing in Camden. Then 18 years old, Craig was offered the opportunity to model for *Burberry’s 2008...*
Spring/Summer Campaign\textsuperscript{29} of which Ryan was also a part [although George fronted the campaign]. From here, George’s profile began to rise and he received great acclaim from high fashion producers. His skinny, long haired and all round dishevelled look began to attract the attention of tastemakers in the scene and he soon found himself a regular fixture of Burberry’s campaigns. His ‘rock n roll’ persona also earned him the front covers of editorial magazines such as Indie, Numero Homme and Dapper Dan. As his modelling career went from strength to strength, so too did the success of his band; One Night Only.

At this point, Craig enjoyed great recognition within the exclusive high fashion and indie music scenes. It was during this time that he began to develop a relationship with famous actor Emma Watson. As a result, he was increasingly featured in more mainstream celebrity culture, gossip magazines such as OK!, Hello, and Closer. The content presented did not praise his band or modelling career. Instead, it unpicked the nature of his relationship. This cast him further into the public eye which led to his previously ‘gritty indie band’ being signed to multinational record label Vertigo. Craig had further dalliances with mainstream celebrities and also released a song ‘Can you feel it?’ as part of a 2011 TV advert campaign for Coca-Cola. For the last two years, he has been in a relationship with X-Factor contestant and pop singer Diana Vickers and has since adopted a more clean-cut, neat look.

Craig’s catapult into the commercial world of celebrity shattered the air of rarity he once embodied. Rather than George Craig; ‘the model’, he has become known as George Craig; ‘Emma Watson’s boyfriend’. While continuing to model, his lifestyle is now under the lens of mainstream, public consumption. This detracts from his edgy, ‘rock n roll’, high fashion look and compromises his cultural legitimacy within this world. For instance, the brand to which he is now associated, Urban Outfitters, sell mass produced clothing styles to mainstream consumers of high street fashion. With his legitimacy jeopardised, Craig’s affective capacity has become diluted through overexposure. As a result, he is doomed to exist in the purgatorial realm of celebrity.

\textbf{Ryan:} And she models for Urban Outfitters! Fucking Urban Outfitters! [laughs] Bloody patchwork fashion. There’s your model Henry!

Celebrities are just...fashion models aren’t celebrities and celebrities aren’t fashion models. The two are completely different. A celebrity is just a normal member of the public who has had more media attention than most normal members of the public. That’s all it is. There’s nothing special about them. They are just well known and in the public eye. We live in a celebrity culture, there’s no getting away from it. People

\textsuperscript{29} Appendix B
look up to them and are sad enough to buy anything that they are attached to because they think that will make them more like them.

PL: Isn’t that the point though? To make the consumer feel as attractive as the celebrity?

Ryan: I’ve modelled for Burberry, Hermès Paris and done shows for Marc Jacobs and Michael Bastian… I am not an attractive man by traditional standards. So it can’t be about good looks [laughs]. But it’s not about making people feel more attractive I don’t think…

Matt: I’m about making them feel included. As though they belong to this world too you know? They buy into it because it enhances their life. It gives them the confidence to do other things that they wouldn’t ordinarily be able to do because they feel like they have the backing of these revered people… They feel if they look a certain way people will think they live a certain way. You don’t get that with celebrity, everyone from David Beckham to the guy who does my bins is a celebrity. I’m not even joking; my bin-man was on X-factor before. Celebrity is a machine of sorts. It is manufactured, it is marketing, and it’s premeditated. I find it so sad when I see people going crazy for celebrities. It’s like; ‘stop embarrassing yourself, you’re just a victim of marketing hype’. But in my opinion, ever since the 60s, it has become completely devoid of value. Like literally, everyone is on television and anyone can be famous. Where is the appeal in that? There’s no style to celebrity. It’s just this vulgar, crass cesspool of tasteless fodder for the unimaginative to gorge on.

In the above extract, both Matt and Ryan exert a vehement distain for the culturally popular and sought after idea of celebrity. Their narrative conveys notions of distinction from the ‘ordinary’ desires of the mainstream; ‘everyone is on television and anyone can be famous’. On the other hand, the model life is depicted as a distinct world, membership of which enhances the lives and characters of those inside. Furthermore, the consecrated are depicted as a refined, elegant and expressive type of people compared to the ‘vulgar, crass cesspool of tasteless fodder’ that is celebrity. The fact that consumers of this popular notion ‘gorge’ on expresses a savagery that further emphasises the distinction and subsequent elevation experienced by intermediaries upon consecration.

Ryan: Yeah, celebrities are just fads. I mean, how many more products can David Beckham advertise? And how long before people say ‘oh look, there he is with his shirt off again, but I’ve seen it before, I’m bored of looking at him now’? I think fashion models have a more subtle fame; it’s more exclusive you know? I mean I don’t want to get mobbed by a bunch of people when I walk down the street. A nod or a wink from the right people means more than a hundred idiots chasing you wanting your autograph. There is certain… intrigue or mystique that comes with that selective anonymity I think.

Matt: Yeah totally, it’s more intriguing I feel. Like, a fashion model is supposed to be anonymous. It’s more captivating that way. You haven’t seen them before. Or maybe you have. We’re not supposed to be memorable. We are an ‘in the moment’ type of thing…interaction. That’s why fashion models are more integral to high fashion. We’re real yet not real if that makes sense? It gives the whole thing an aura of mystery that you don’t get with celebrities.

Celebrities are described as ‘fads’ whose cultural significance is fleeting. Fads do not possess ‘a line of historical continuity; each springs up independently of a forerunner and gives no rise
to a successor’ (Blumer 1969: 283). In this sense, fads enjoy a temporary popularity yet ultimately fizzle out once they are perceived as boring or useless. Conversely, the ‘trend’ embodied by cultural intermediaries of high fashion are ‘a highly important yet much neglected object of study. They signify a convergence and marshalling of collective taste in a given direction and thus pertain to one of the most significant yet obscure features in group life’ (Blumer 1969: 283). I interpret from the above data that fashion models position themselves as trends, that is, they are descendants of a fashionable lineage of aesthetic and culturally rarefied taste.

In actuality, notions of “celebrity” and “model” are not discrete categories. Similar to commercial and high fashion, the distinction is based on the latter’s continuous attempts to keep the veil of secrecy raised through perpetuating high fashion’s association to artistic endeavours (Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014) rather than associate itself with the popular cultural concept of fame which is omnipresent. Thus, fashion models retain their mystique through their carefully crafted consumption and production processes (e.g. Continual consecrations in the form of various campaigns that reinforce their mystique) that evoke a rarity and chameleonic identity that cannot be pinned down to the same extent as certain categories of celebrity. A prime example of such are the descriptions of affective labour captured in my narratives. These narratives persistently refer to fame in derogatory terms, portraying it as tasteless.

A further imposed/constructed distinction between the world of high fashion and celebrity is that we know who celebrities are. They embody a celebrated narrative that is open to be read and interpreted by the masses. Also, crucially, this is a narrative that rarely changes but rather is cemented into pop culture folklore. That is, the omnipresent nature of celebrity has exposed the private lives of the famous as objects of public consumption. The exponential expansion in ‘reality’ television production indicates the celebrity lifestyle is one coveted within the mass market. The result of which erodes any potential mystique or ‘aura’ with which they might be endowed. Furthermore, the ease with which a member of the public can achieve fame devalues its cultural legitimacy from the perspective of those that conform to the artistic ideologies of high fashion.

While the embodiment of rarity is a fundamental quality by which to mediate the avant-garde tastes of high fashion, a paradox exists that requires articulation. Given Kate Moss’ fame, she is, by definition, a ‘celebrity’. The difference is that Moss and her equally ‘celebrated’ peers
do not exude fame for fame’s sake. Although their image is diffused among consumer culture, individuals are not consuming Kate Moss: the woman, wife and mother. She has managed to maintain significant rarity by (rather than ‘selling’ herself) weaving a variety of fashionable personas that do not necessarily reflect her private life but instead, reflect a character and branded lifestyle. In other words, her look is one suffused with intense affective capacity felt by viewers rather than meaningful discourses to be read by the masses.

Thus, the rarity of Moss (and some of her contemporaries) endures as she has achieved that which very few cultural intermediaries have; becoming consecrated as a high fashion brand (Parmentier and Fischer 2007). The capacity of a model to graduate to iconic status is dependent on her/his cultural impact. For example, Moss’ cultural impact and subsequent ‘aura’ stems from her being ‘spiritually consecrated’ (Bourdieu 1993: 101) through embodying an affecting presence with which to lead a revolution. That is, she has become a quintessential aspect of high fashion ideology (Belk et al. 1989). Similar to Macintosh, which began a technological revolution (Belk and Tumbat 2005), both engender cult-like devotion. Her look has become an archetypal, high fashion brand. Despite her notoriety, she retains the cultural rarity embodied by her look and subsequent legitimacy due to her cultural impact on high fashion and also, her intense affective capacity. Her brand remains deeply permeated by artistic ideologies as she remains a deity to those who truly believe in the magic of high fashion. She has managed to achieve this through continual consecration and a chameleonic persona whose affective energies can be made to change at will.

Contrastingly, George Craig does not and arguably was not given the chance to cultivate such affective capacity due to his foray into mainstream and liaisons with several ‘safe’ celebrities. The manufactured rarity of high fashion depends on accruing a subtle recognition or else a carefully crafted renown, which still retains rarity through the embodied performance of chameleonism. In both cases, intermediaries’ styles of consumption and production must be in line with notions of aesthetic taste and artistic behaviour if they are to maintain the mystique upon which the ‘dream’ depends.

Yet McCracken (1989) argues celebrity endorsement bestows powerful value onto brands due to the cultural meaning with which the celebrity is endowed. He claims that celebrities are very different to anonymous models as they exert greater support to the meaning which is conveyed by the ad; ‘celebrities offer a range of personality and lifestyle meaning that the model cannot provide… celebrities offer configurations of meaning that models can never possess’.
(McCracken 1989:315). Based on the above narrative, that which distinguishes celebrities and models is that fashion models are ‘real but not real’. While celebrities are symbolic containers of generic and predominantly fixed cultural meaning, cultural intermediaries of high fashion must embody an uncertainty, unpredictability and rarity that endow and culturally legitimate their world as distinct. In this respect, models portray affective characters. They are vacuums that become filled with fashionably esoteric qualities and affective intensities before subsequently, becoming emptied and restored anew when existing qualities become stale. Their significance as arbiters of tastes stems from their unique capacity to mobilise affect which commands viewers’ attention and recognition. In doing so, they frame the consumption experience and invoke a felt sense of vitality in bodies through the creation of an affective tie that transcends the ‘bland’, ‘crass’ and ‘vulgar’ promises embodied by celebrities.

4.4 ‘Won the genetic lottery..!’

I have interpreted from my narrative data that in opposing the accessible world of commerciality and celebrity, intermediaries of the model life rationalise their consecration within these exclusive boundaries as natural and thus, a foregone conclusion as described by Jon.

Jon: My grandfather was a tailor. He made these really up-market, stylish looking suits. They were in really high demand. People would come from all over London to buy one. I remember as a kid, seeing the suits on mannequins. They looked immaculate. It was difficult not to imagine yourself wearing them. He sold them out of his cardboard box sized boutique just off Carnaby Street. Err...no what am I saying? It was on Carnaby Street. Anyway, his attitude always was; ‘if you’ve got nothing, at least dress well’. Then people wouldn’t know you’d fallen on hard times. He hated sympathy. He thought that was rude and the worst thing you could give someone...because instantly that person is above you looking down. Sometimes I’d go with him to open the store in the mornings, he’d be dressed to the nines, three piece suit, hair slicked back, moisturised cheek bones, golden pocket watch and shining shoes. Everyone knew him. I thought he was the richest man in the world even though I never saw him actually handle money. It was the aura he gave off you know? It was only when I got a little older I realised how financially poor he actually was. He couldn’t keep up with the rent for that location so eventually he had to close it down. Died six months later. I asked my Dad why he didn’t just move to a more affordable location and he told me that it was never about money for my grandfather. He used to say; ‘it doesn’t matter if you only have two pence to rub together, what matters is how easy you made it’. You can’t take money with you but what stays behind is your legacy. That affects people more than a bank balance.

The narrative conveyed here conforms to the artistic ideologies of high fashion and constructs an image of a person who desired recognition and reverence rather than financial gain. Given the affective relationship that seems to have existed between the pair, Jon recalls the death of his grandfather as a type of conversion experience (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), as though opposition to commercialism is woven into the lineage of his family. It also demonstrates the
affective forces that underpin this type of consumption. For example, his grandfather detested being shown sympathy as he considered it to instantly elevate others to a station above his. Yet similarly, I interpret that this sentiment did not stem from a desire for equality among all people. Rather, it derived from a desire that he be elevated above others.

Jon’s nostalgic account of his grandfather portrays an idealised image of a man. Upon the turning point moment that was his death, Jon’s passionate narrative and image of his grandfather as reverent became concretised. The impact of such an event causes him to romanticise the values and beliefs held by the man and subsequently adopt them. The rational clues one could interpret become filtered and transformed to change the story. For example, the old man’s health and financial situation were questionable, yet this information is altered through references to prestige. The fact that his ‘boutique’ was the size of a ‘cardboard box’ suggests perhaps a small, family run, barely profitable company. Also, that this was located on or perhaps (more than likely) off (which could entail any distance) the exclusive Carnaby Street further alters my interpretation.

That his cheekbones were visibly protruding suggests rather frail, gaunt frame that subsequently resulted in death six months later. Yet for Jon, the emotional capital amassed from these experiences have solidified his perception of high fashion as containing ‘pure’ qualities where those that belong are revered and escape the commercial restrictions imposed by daily life. That his ‘natural’ sentiment ingrained from past experiences is one that permeates my discussions with cultural intermediaries. For example, when a model is ‘discovered’, a Polaroid image is immediately taken to assess the pure, affecting presence of the model.

Miles: Polaroid’s instantly confirm whether or not a model has that special quality. It’s just a pure image you know? Everything is stripped away… no hair stylists, make up, fancy lighting, expensive cameras…it’s just them and their look. There is no hiding your blemishes or insecurities here, you have to embrace them. So the Polaroid exposes you in a way…’warts and all’. With everything laid bare like this, we can soon feel if the model can translate their initial impact from the street into an image. They have to be effortlessly photogenic, otherwise, there is nothing. No feeling or impact, no emotional connection in the shot.

Fiona: Yeah, so while we’re looking at their physical features but I am looking to see what these features do…do they make me feel anything when I look at the photograph. It has to pierce your soul. Am I offered a glimpse into the model’s life? Their character? Does it jump out and grab me? A Polaroid is great in that sense. But even with the rapid expansion of social media… Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are being used a lot too. But truly, if a model really has that special quality, they could roll out of bed and take a passport photo and still look stunning…they are just effortlessly chic.

The further emphasis on ‘purity’ and ‘special quality’ produces spiritual attributes that bestow cultural legitimacy upon the consecrated. For instance, Bourdieu (1985: 23) argues that works
produced by a field such as high fashion are considered pure as they ‘demand of the receiver a specifically aesthetic disposition in conformity with the principles of their production’. That the purity conveyed by a photogenic presence must ‘pierce the soul’ demands it possess rare affective capacity. Recognition and/or embodiment of this affecting presence confer a legitimacy and distinction on individuals’ aesthetic sensibilities within the field. Furthermore, purity is considered by my participants as that which derives organically from within, rather than being strictly manufactured. Thus, I interpret this unique capacity as a component of one’s habitus. As such, it facilitates the mobilisation of affect that animates an aesthetic experience that ‘engages and deceives the viewer’ (Schroeder 2002).

Models’ purity is consumed with a ‘tactile eye’ (Featherstone 2010) in that viewers feel it. Yet its grasp evades the cognitive dimension, instead being referred to as ‘a certain something’ - an ineffable magic quality that the old-fashioned notion of ‘charisma’ or ‘charm’ goes some way to capturing - that is conveyed in the photograph and on the runway’ (Entwistle 2009: 68). The photogenic capacity of a model to provoke an affective response in viewers endows her/him with unique potential and legitimacy. The effortlessness with which the model creates an impact makes her/his affective capacities appear innate and reflects her/his natural endowment of rarefied, culturally consecrated attributes. According to Montero (2013), ‘effortlessness’ is a social value that conveys a type of ethereal magnetism. Moreover, it provokes an immediate bodily effect, rather than relating to one’s cerebral dimension. Upon experiencing these affective intensities, the viewer is absorbed into ‘something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world’ (Beane and Doty 1975: 141). Professional photographer, Clare, reinforces the affective magnetism with which models are endowed by comparing them to a mythical construct.

Clare: When I was a kid, I was, and still am actually… infatuated with mermaids and the myth surrounding them. These days, I work with mermaids of a sort in the shape of great models. They share a lot of the same characteristics… they both have this pure… ethereal presence that beguiles you into following them. So you might be sailing along in life and you happen upon a model with that special presence, and they just enrapture you. They grab you and pull you under.

To indulge this metaphor further, mermaids are mythical creatures characterised as beautiful young women, who reside in an alternate world under the sea. After dark, they ascend to the surface and from under the moonlight call young men by name. Their beauty is such that it enchants men (sailors) to venture out into the water where upon being lured, they are drowned. The reference to these mythical creatures and the natural purity embodied by models raises an important point regarding belief. By consecrating a meaningful rather than traditionally
beautiful look, tastemakers reaffirm a belief in the ineffable purity and ‘magic’ of the field. Consecration thus confers the model with ‘ethereal’, spiritual like qualities and the capacity to trigger the senses of bodies in relation. Similarly, models’ belief in the ideologies of the model life and in the authenticity of their consecration manifests in their narratives.

Jacob: I don’t know what to tell you. I mean…this is me. As far as my body goes, I guess I’m just won of the lucky ones…

Clark: Won the genetic lottery! added Clark as he attempted to peel off a tight fitting t-shirt.

Jacob: Yeah suppose so, I don’t know…I mean…I was going to say that I do everything the opposite to what a fashion model does…I smoke, I drink, drugs…late nights no sleep…but that’s what fashion models do isn’t it? It’s one of the freedoms afforded to us I suppose…from being chosen. I mean if you have to work at being a model, you’re not really a model. You either have it or you don’t. And most people don’t. I mean, if you have to go to the gym, lift weights and run on a machine for an hour a day…that seems like an awful lot of work to try and become someone you’re not doesn’t it?’ Taking an hour out of your day to go lift heavy weights up and down, when you could be sleeping, drinking or dare I say shagging [laughs]…it’s for the birds mate. If being a fashion model was about working out and looking great, then everyone who goes to the gym would be fashion models.

By articulating their identities as natural, models legitimate their consecration and also generate a connection to the artistic ideologies of the model life while preserving distance from the labour intensive practices of working out. The natural embodiment of consecrated qualities typified by ‘you either have it or you don’t’ disengages these intermediaries from objective reality and the majority of consumers. For example, while drinking, smoking, taking drugs and promiscuity could be considered somewhat immoral, in the world of high fashion, they are hedonic rites of passage. These hedonistic and controversial acts of consumption have been used (either directly or indirectly) to glamourize countless brand campaigns.

For example, in 2005, Kate Moss was pictured sniffing white powder on a train that led to controversial headlines regarding drug abuse. However, in the long run, this did not inflict lasting damage (but actually improved) to her or the fashion industry. Similarly, Cara Delevingne (dubbed ‘the new Kate Moss’) was pictured dropping a small bag of white powder while leaving her home in Hampstead, London, yet her career continues to skyrocket. This is because the various meanings associated with these modes of behaviour fit with the culturally, socially and artistically liberated values of high fashion. As Jacob intimates, engaging in these hedonistic, irresponsible, and dangerous pursuits is a ‘freedom’ afforded to models by virtue of being consecrated. In doing so, they embody a position that exists beyond the restrictions imposed by ordinary life (e.g. the law) to a world where there is no fear of
consequence. Upon being captured in an image, their ‘immortality’ is further ingrained and mediated to high fashion audiences.

The narrative below evokes further hedonistic connotations associated with high fashion. Intimations such as ‘life’s too short to stay in any night’ construct an image of the model life as one without rules and traditional constraints imposed by the working week. Consecration acts as a tonic for the excesses of such a lifestyle while also offering justification for these consumption behaviours.

Henry: I don’t have that discipline personally. If someone told me, ‘ah you have to watch what you eat because you have that runway show next week!’ ‘I’d be like what? Forget that’. Life’s too short to be watching what you eat and staying in on a Saturday night man. Life’s too short to stay in any night for the matter. To be honest, that’s actually probably what keeps me thin you know! I can never eat a whole lot the next day because I’m always too bloody hungry! I just go around the place picking at bits and pieces. I couldn’t even stomach a full meal. No chance. Couldn’t handle it.

Matt: Yeah too right. All I can manage is a smoothie and a handful of cashew nuts [laughs]. But yeah, as far as being a fashion model goes…it’s…there’s definitely something there. You’re the academic, I’ll let you describe it, I can’t find the words [laughs]. I was actually told before by…who was it? It was either a photographer or some casting agent…no…no it was a casting agent… I was doing a casting for a campaign for Burberry. I was a bit pissed off to be honest because it was a 9am casting call and it got me out of bed. But I went in, shagged, I’d been out the night before, it was actually the first time I’d ever tried ketamine right? [laughs] Fuck me, should have seen me the next morning. It was on in this massive suite in the Four Seasons there on Park Lane, went to the wrong floor first, and walked in on some wedding function. So out of it. Finally found the place, I was late so there was no line, result! Just threw my book at them ‘here you go’, walked for them, think my eyes were still glued shut with sleep at this point, couldn’t even see where I was going. There have been over a hundred guys in and out in the two minutes I was there and I was the only one who looked like they hadn’t washed in a week [laughs]. Walked straight back out of the room, fucked, could’ve still had my pyjamas on for all I knew [laughs].

Tom: Well…?

Matt: What did the casting agent say you prat!?

Tom: What?

Matt: Oh! [laughs] He called me on my phone about two hours later. Woke me up and all, but he gave me the job. Just said ‘we were all really taken in by your look, it’s really great’ [laughs]. I was like ‘oh, right [yawn] ok, thanks. I’ll give you my mum and dad’s number; this is their doing not mine.

Entwistle (2004) however offers an alternate interpretation. She notes that the conception of a ‘natural body’ was a discursive strategy by which the fashion model could protect his masculinity as he engages in traditionally deemed, feminine pursuits (Patterson and Elliott 2004). The author further argues that this strategy was adopted by models to avoid appearing vain or narcissistic. Yet, to my interpretation, it is clear that the narrative further perpetuates the artistic values of high fashion and also the cultural rarity and legitimacy that
stems from spiritual consecration (Bourdieu 1985). For example, Matt’s diet of a ‘smoothie and a handful of cashew nuts’ is rationalised as a consequence imposed by his lifestyle.

Furthermore, I am led to interpret from his experience of a casting30 that this ritualistic ceremony of consecration is merely an inconvenient impediment to the hedonistic lifestyle in which he revels. An earnest belief in his consecration manifests as perhaps a confidence, or an apparent lack of interest in becoming employed by Burberry. For example, ‘just threw my book at them’ and ‘my eyes were still glued shut with sleep’ appear to be performative pieces of language that evoke the rebel persona that perhaps ironically or more than likely, purposely, made him attractive to the high fashion brand.

4.5 ‘The mundane is fashion’s cancer…’

A further pertinent point is that the rarity that underpins high fashion is preserved by the ephemerality of its narrative. For high fashion is a social happening (Blumer 1969) and as such, changes as life changes. In a ‘hot society’31 (Levi-Strauss 1966), continued renewal is imperative in order to capture and mirror the fleeting ‘spirit of the times’ (Blumer 1969). Entwistle (2009) has argued that to the outsider, fashion appears as ‘change for change’s sake’. It possesses an internal logic which is bound up in economic value; ‘this season’s hot denim label or exciting ‘new face’ of fashion modelling can sell at quite a price today…economic value is always and everywhere undermined by the systemic momentum of change, as another ‘new face’ or ‘cult’ denim label, or ‘hot’ colour will inevitably follow’ (Entwistle 2009:51). However, there is logical substance to the field’s seemingly non-rational behaviour. When prevailing tastes begin to achieve longevity (generally having been prevalent for three to five months in the case of high fashion), they develop a familiarity and begin to adhere closer to the mundane and routinized aspects of objective reality32.

To prevent this, castings are regular (weekly) events that occur ‘behind the scenes’ of the high fashion veil. Unlike the unplanned ‘discovery’, castings are orchestrated events during which

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30 Castings are the equivalent of job interviews for models. Rather than a traditional cv, models must demonstrate their affective capacity via their walk and also their photogenic appeal as illustrated by their portfolio.

31 Societies in which change is a cultural value. These societies accept and willingly encourage change in order to maintain economic, cultural and social sectors (Berber and Lobel 1953).

32 During the Second World War, fashion models were aesthetically ‘ordinary’ and embodied ‘accessibility’ and ‘cheerfulness’ in an age of austerity. To counter this, designer Christian Dior produced the ‘New Look’, an extravagant escape from the dull and practical nature of fashion imposed on it by social conditions. Dior instead showcased female models in high heels, flared skirts, haughty eyebrows and sleek hair, a look which was previously unseen. The ‘new look’ became indicative of a lifestyle embodied by the projection of a fashionable persona and style that evoked emancipation from ordinary life, wealth, sophistication and self-assuredness. Soon, the top models in New York adopted this appearance in a bid to evoke these lifestyle traits (Soley-Beltran 2004).
gatekeepers (casting directors, magazine editors, photographers etc.) sit on a panel and attempt to match a look or ‘personality’ to a particular brand campaign. As the name would suggest, gatekeepers are responsible for proliferating culturally valorised notions of ‘what’s hot and what’s not’. Diffusion of these notions relies on selecting a model(s) with the affective capacity to animate a seductive character that fits the brand and that makes an emotional connection with viewers.

In this instance, I was invited to attend a selective casting for the upcoming LFW that was taking place in a large warehouse-turned-studio near Bond Street in London. I met Jonny, the casting director responsible for hiring models to represent a relatively new, avant-garde brand making its debut at Fashion Week. Outside a large double door were three brown leather couches where models would wait until summoned. Inside, I noticed a make shift runway that stretched approximately twenty yards. It was illuminated by bright bulbs down each flank. A long table covered in black cloth and set to accommodate four people was menacingly positioned at the end of the runway. To the left of the runway stood a white screen against which a Polaroid would be taken. Its purpose was to capture an undefined image by repressing the subject’s potential relation to the outside world (Schroeder 2002; Sennett 1990). In other words, it helped to capture the ‘pure’ and ‘esoteric’ nature of the model’s look (Bourdieu 1985).

Earlier in the day, I spoke with Jonny about what he was hoping to achieve from the casting.

Jonny: We have to find models that perfectly encapsulate the designer’s vision for this collection. The number one goal of a debut brand is to win over the people in the front row. The story being told has to make sense, it has to be engaging and captivating. The fabrics have to come alive on the runway and inspire those in attendance. Models are an integral part of that. They bring the clothes to life and give them personality. But if for instance, we hire one person out of the bunch, the show will look disconnected and the story won’t make sense. It will fall apart. So, no pressure! [laughs]

Similar to his contemporaries, Jonny enhances the artistic legitimacy of the show while creating a distance from its corporate aspects. Rather than a forum from which to sell clothes, Jonny conceptualises the show as a platform from which to tell a story. Models are central characters to this narrative as it is ultimately their magical powers that invest the collection with affective capacity that makes these lifeless pieces of fabric ‘come alive’. The vitality produced by the mobilisation of affect conforms to high fashion’s artistic ideologies and directly contrasts with traditional ideas of uniformity and stagnation.

33 As opposed to an open invitation casting where a wide range of models arrive, this casting is more selective of the look required and subsequently invited.
Adele: Fashion wouldn’t be fashion if it didn’t change. Change is necessary. It’s so easy to get into a rut, plodding along, same routine, same style, before you know it life has passed you by. Fashion is important because it wakes people up to the world around them. It emancipates them... gives them the map with which to find a way out of their mundane daily lives. The mundane is fashion’s cancer. It does it through telling stories that we can become a part of. It’s emotional, it’s sensual… it’s captivating and enchanting. That’s why I am sitting in on this casting today. Finding the right models is so important. They have to embody the thoughts, ideas, beliefs and emotions of a movement.

Here, Adele communicates the artistic values of her collection by comparing it to ‘a movement’. Furthermore, the fact that fashion can “wake” people, suggests a felt vitality invoked by the affective capacity of fashion. She also attributes human characteristics of emotion and feeling to her designs. Again, the notion that fashion tells stories rather than sells clothes retains its culturally elevated status. Furthermore, this piece of narrative contains slightly darker tones with references such as ‘life has passed you by’ and ‘the mundane is fashion’s cancer’. From this, I interpret that the consumption of aesthetic experiences through engagement with high fashion is not solely a recreational practice. It is performed not with the desire to rely experience this higher form of life but rather, to exist within it. Given that most engage with this form of commercial fashion, its description as an illness further elevates the experience of high fashion as pure and transcendent and only available to an elite audience. Before the casting, models appear as mere ‘mortals’ that are aspiring to become spiritually consecrated (Bourdieu 1993).

Jonny: Today we will have about… 400-500 models walk through the doors. I feel sorry for them sometimes, just lining up, shaking… waiting to hear if they made it into heaven.

As casting director, Jonny acts as a St. Peter type figure who guards the gates of heaven. Moreover, the religious themes of death in the present and immortality in the model life are further reinforced by aspiring model Ben.

Ben: Remember the arena in Ancient Rome? All of the slaves would sit in the dungeon before being pushed into the arena to fight to the death in front of the emperor for his entertainment. It’s complete chaos for a while and then at the end the emperor decides on your fate. It’s like that. In the same way the people are chanting to tell him what to do, designers, and brands have to consider what will work for their brand. In the end, one person gets chosen and becomes immortalised in the campaign. The others, even past champions who used to be successful are jeered, and thrown back into the dungeons or killed. Either way they are forgotten about.

This piece of narrative contrasts greatly with Matt’s nonchalant attitude referenced earlier. Ben’s trepidation exposes the severe and fatal nature of this ceremony of consecration. For example, describing models as ‘slaves’ who ‘sit in the dungeon’ illustrates the competitive nature of the industry, but also the previously unmentioned consequences of not being chosen to exist in this alternate reality. Ben, having had some success with very prestigious brands is
now at the twilight of his career and cannot seem to attain further work. Despite his past success, the public consecration necessary to re-establish his cultural legitimacy and remain ‘immortal’ eludes him. His inability to match the ephemeral demands of high fashion ensures that he is ‘killed’ or ‘forgotten about’ in the eyes of the brand. To this end, the capacity of models to act as storytellers, propagators, and evangelists of the ephemeral high fashion myths demands they be versatile and possess a chameleonic identity (Venkatesh et al. 2010).

‘Chameleonism’ is similar to possessing a photogenic look in that it is a significant social and cultural value (Soley-Beltran 2004). The chameleonic capacity to embody a range of emotions supersedes the projection of an ideal gendered representation according to Wissinger (2007a: 236); ‘if modelling work were primarily or solely orientated toward creating gendered ideals of femininity, masculinity, sexiness, or beauty, for example, it would stand to reason that my respondents would have talked more about giving their efforts to making models sexy, or womanly, or beautiful. I found instead…the models I interviewed and those who worked with them, were more orientated toward achieving a level of variability, a chameleon like look that can be made to change at will’.

With regard to the consumption experience, a chameleonic look generates economic value in that it ‘enables a product to be sold and resold in slightly different form, many times over, and it is the constant reselling of the chameleonic object that generates much of the wealth of an industrialised economy’ (Finkelstein 1991:130). Importantly, I refer to ‘chameleonism’ not in the traditional sense of changing appearance. As consumption and production in an affective economy is influenced by emotion (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Elliott 1998; Belk et al. 2003; Joy and Sherry 2003), I interpret from my data chameleonism as a form of reincarnation. That is, it refers to the capacity of the model to identify with and embody a variety of different looks that encapsulate different characters or personalities. As previously noted, models are vacuums that become filled with affective intensities and subsequently dispensed or re-appropriated when these emotional experiences begin to edge toward the generic, ordinary and common.

Due to the ephemeral nature of high fashion, the ability to project a series of alternate personalities is indicative of greater cultural legitimacy (Barthes 1977). For example, quoted in Keenan (1977: 136), a fashion editor observed that ‘the nameless models whose careers endure for years are the chameleons that lose their identities in whatever the fashion of the moment
happens to be’. More often than not, this does not involve a radical alteration to a model’s physical appearance as noted by Tom R and Adele.

Tom R: Fashion is about liberation, imagination and expression but this expression isn’t so much about saying ‘hi I’m Tom and I am this type of person. That’s boring and restrictive. These designs are more about saying ‘hi I’m Tom and this is how I’m feeling today’. Fashion is a voice for your inner emotions, a way for people to tell if you’re interesting or not [laughs].

Adele: Totally, looking different is not either here or there really. They have to be different…how they are perceived, their characters. I mean… Brad Pitt is still always recognisable as Brad Pitt but you don’t always engage with him as Brad Pitt the celebrity. Because he is not Brad Pitt when he is presented to us on screen. He is portraying a different character so we engage with him differently based on the emotions he embodies. Fashion is no different. Different collections evoke different emotions when you wear them, tell different stories. So with different collections come different characters. We will always recognise Kate Moss, Cara Delvingne or Bastian Van Galen based on appearance because they are distinctive. But what changes is how we engage with them within the different contexts in which they appear.

From this, I interpret an important affective dimension to the embodiment of a character and subsequent mediation of belief in the transubstantiation offered by the consumption experience. While physical appearance is somewhat fixed, the artefacts used by models to adopt and project different characters are clothing. For example, in her biography, Naomi Campbell appreciates that ‘clothes have their own personality, and…[that] a good model becomes the clothes she wears, a dapping her own character to complement the garment’ (Jones 1993: 56). The supermodel further notes that she always adopts a different character based on the brand she is representing and also, the story (consumption experience) to be told by an image; ‘everything I put on feels different, it’s like a different character’ (Jones 1993: 56).

In an affective economy, the embodied expression of various looks is ‘an emotional exercise’ (Entwistle 2002) whereby cultural intermediaries inhabit a character. The ultimate aim is to animate belief in the story being told through the creation of an affective connection; ‘clothing, however, like tone of voice and speed of utterance, conveys other kinds of moral quality- the texture and style and flavour of the self… In a sense, beautiful clothes are beautiful manners… Clothes make the man, not because they make up or invent what the man is or dress him up for show but because they actually create his conscious self. You are what you wear- and especially when class structure lacks rigidity…When you are dressed in any particular way at all, you are revealed rather than hidden’ (Hollander 1980: 444).

As different clothing is equated with different personalities (Soley-Beltran 2004), models’ animation of a character (constitutive of past affective states) represents felt emotions to bodies
in relation. Through contagion, the clothing becomes suffused with the affective capacity of the cultural intermediary. That is, it is bestowed ‘character’ and subsequently legitimated as fashionable. Thus, when brought ‘to life’, it becomes part of an animated narrative. The affective capacity evoked by intermediaries’ stylistic processes of consumption and production make the experience resonate with audiences; ‘style wants us to love it and, we want to be absorbed by it, we want to lend ourselves to what it has become’ (Thrift 2010: 297). This is further illustrated by Adele.

Adele: There is character in my designs definitely. It is embedded in the fabric and in the stitching. A part of who I am is in my garments. You don’t spend countless hours working on a design, literally shedding blood, sweat and tears to end up with some lifeless, inanimate object you know? There is a story behind aesthetic design…great drama. Fashion models are important because they tell your story. They bring the clothes to life so the audience can feel those emotions that went in to making them.

The affective tie felt to the consumption experience is forged by the affecting presence rather than the physical garment. Yet, the piece of clothing, having become consecrated as legitimate is now constitutive of the enchanting character and narrative animated by models’ circulation of affect. Far from superficial, the mediation of these affective states suggests a ‘deep’ intimacy that establishes an emotional connection with an audience.

Tom R: It’s quite an intimate thing if you think about it. We make assumptions about who they are, where they are from, what they are doing later. Of course we might be completely wrong but that’s not the point. Great style conjures fantasy in a way. Whereas bad style just padlocks every door through which we might escape the mundane. It locks us into this dark, dreary confinement where there is no sun peeping through. That’s why models are so important. They are a ray of light into the dreary day to day. They effortlessly embody the style of the moment. They are expressive; it’s exciting, appealing, and vibrant and grabs your attention! Everything looks great on them. They just exude that effortless that’s so attractive; it radiates these magnetic qualities that just lure you in.

Illustrated above is the intimate, emotional connection made by cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect. The contagious, intensified nature of the affective tie invokes emancipation as the emotions an imitated by intermediaries contagiously adhere to bodies in relation. Thus, intermediaries with the chameleon-ic bility to act as conduits of ‘new’ emotions are consecrated at castings and similar ceremonies. While we might conceptualise high fashion as a form of identity expression (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Venkatesh et al. 2010), we must also appreciate it as an enchanting narrative framed by cultural intermediaries’. Consumption of this narrative produces an aesthetic experience whereby affected bodies can escape the mundane dullness of daily life. I interpret the necessary ‘vocabulary’ as cultural intermediaries’ stylised consumption and production processes that mobilise affective energies to animate the narrative. The connection made with tastemakers consecrates arbiters of taste.
during various ceremonies that further legitimates a branded promise of emancipation from the ‘dark, dreary confinement’ of mundane reality and transcendence to ‘the light’ of the model life.

4.6 Conclusion

I began this chapter with an introspective piece designed to illustrate my initial experiences of London Fashion Week. The otherness and difference I experienced was felt through ‘the look’. I describe the look as the embodiment of affective intensities, culturally valorised beliefs and coded symbolic attributes. The affecting presence (Armstrong 1971) of the look enchants those attached to the field to believe in its capacities. Upon doing so, the intermediary and consumption experience (s)he mediates are elevated to a higher, more authentic reality. Importantly, only those that have been consecrated possess the ability to decipher and mediate high fashion’s ‘magical’ code. I interpret this ‘magic’ as veiled consumption and production processes that engender belief in the transubstantiation offered by the consumption experience.

Furthermore, the field of high fashion is one of competition for cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985) and governed by artistic, rather than corporate ideologies. A clear distinction is made between the field of high fashion and that of commercial fashion. For example, as a field of restricted production (Bourdieu 1985), high fashionforegrounds a look that is esoteric, pure and abstract rather than a traditional depiction of physical beauty. Distinct from the culturally popular notion of celebrity, I interpret intermediaries’ as descendants from a fashionable lineage of culturally rare and aesthetic taste. There is an emphasis placed on ‘depth’, which I interpret as the performance of a particular character to ‘fit’ the story being told by an image. The production of an affect-laden experience animates a narrative of consecration and spirituality that is intended to elicit intense emotions and imitation from bodies in relation.

I also observed that in order to remain culturally legitimate, a chameleonic identity facilitates the animation of a new fashionable narrative and the embodiment of new characters/personalities. The affective connection made by cultural intermediaries authenticates the narrative and the fashionability of the branded collection that becomes part of the model life by contagion. The effortlessness (intimations of natural performance, inheritance of fashionability, becoming endowed as special etc.) with which cultural intermediaries frame the consumption experience mesmerises those in relation and provokes embodied belief in the ‘magic’ of high fashion. Cultural intermediaries are progenitors of this belief through their rare styles of consumption and production. In the following chapter, I
further explore the nature of this belief and the authentication of the consumption experience through these processes that mobilise affect.
5. Narratives of Deification

Her mission over, Irish departed, 
for she could no longer bear the compelling influence of Sleep. 
As she felt his drowsiness stealing into her limbs, 
she escaped and traversed once more 
the arched path by which she had lately come. 

Ovid XI: 454.

5.1 Introduction

There is a n air of vitality on set as it is in the corner of a shabby, abandoned warehouse attempting to stay as much out of the way as possible. Today, the former furniture storage facility is transformed into a set where Helmut Lang is shooting its latest fragrance campaign; ‘I smell you on my skin’. The scene is a dark, gritty bedroom with the off-white sheets in disarray. I observe that there is a strict emphasis placed on creating an atmosphere conducive to the stirring of a certain ambience. Conducive to the rebellious nature of the brand, a loud dubstep beat is used to create a favourable ‘vibe’ in the room. The models dance, and jaunt about the room until called upon. Sat in the makeup chair was an impossibly beautiful woman with long, wavy, auburn hair, having dark eye shadow reapplied. Between shots, I spoke with the makeup artist regarding the context of the shoot.

Clare: It’s a gritty, rock type of vibe. At the same time, we’re communicating strong themes like love, attraction and lust. Lust is a big one so I’m forever dabbing the models with baby oil so it looks like they have been sweating, just to give it a bit more of a sexualised tone… but not too much! It’s a fine line [laughs]. Abi is perfect for this campaign though. I’ve worked with her once before, she is amazing. She just triggers passion with every move of her body and doesn’t even know it. She is oblivious to how magnetic she is.

I can’t help but agree. As she stands dominantly at the foot of the bed for some individual shots, each subtle move of her body and change of facial expression captivates the room. Her ‘magnetism’ as Clare referred to it was indeed captivating and made it difficult to turn away. As she continues to roll around on the bed, each suggestive pose is fleeting. Upon being captured by the flash of the photographer, she morphs into another provocative expression. Having completed the individual shots, the campaign also wants to produce some shots with a male presence for which my participant Liam was booked. Having sat in the makeup chair, he enters the frame of the bedroom. At this point, even I can tell he appears slightly rigid. The theme of the shoot is such that the photographer keeps reiterating the need for ‘intense shots’. As per the specification, the couple roll around on the bed while caressing each other while a
heavy ‘dubstep’ merges from the speakers. Yet it still looks slightly ‘awkward, and lacking intimacy’ as noted by Clare. Indeed, the shots were ‘not working’ as observed by the photographer; ‘Liam! She’s not your sister, lean in closer!’ he yells.

The beautiful female model passionately kisses Liam on the lip that draws a feint gasp from onlookers. With that, a surge of confidence shoots through Liam as he removes the girl’s vest top. They writhe around amongst the sheets, holding, grabbing and kissing each other while always remaining within the frame of the shot. The photographer falls silent so as not to interrupt the flow of the couple. There is a definite change to the energy felt on set. The atmosphere is one of intense intimacy during which both models appear liberated, confident and lustful. After ten minutes of constant shooting, the pair begins to slow down. As though forgetting we are here, they laugh hysterically when they see their audience, while holding their intimate embrace, foreheads touching. A rapturous round of applause echoes around the warehouse as both still look slightly shaken and unawares as to what has just occurred.

Following the shoot, I was very surprised how I became utterly wrapped up and seduced by the explosive and charismatic energy exhibited by the pair. The world around was paused and irrelevant as my attention became riveted to the scene. While I did not necessarily want the product, I wanted those images that were unfolding before me and being captured in print. The photographer joked that the toughest job he had was to choose those images that Helmut Lang could actually use and that wouldn’t be banned. While packing my things, I noticed the pair shake hands; ‘it was lovely working with you, bye’ said the female model, as she skipped across the street to where her boyfriend was waiting.

5.2 ‘I just broke down in tears…’

While it is perhaps difficult to describe a moment in an abandoned warehouse, amidst sweaty sheets and strangers as high fashion, there was a moment where we became mesmerised by that which was occurring before us. As the photographer noted, there was an undeniable energy communicated between the pair that resulted in a momentary change to our physiological makeup. The intensified affective force that changed our embodied dispositions is most

34 As noted at the end of chapter one, to further articulate the aims of this research, I have broken this chapter into two parts. That is, I have chosen to explore two different consumption experiences of the model life; the first half analyses bodies’ experiences of the image while the second half deconstructs the affect-laden narrative of a fashion show. In doing so, I present narrative data that in different ways, illustrates how the mobilisation of affect frames the consumption experience of the model life through animating a narrative of deification that impacts bodies in relation.
commonly described as ‘charisma’; ‘the appearance, manners, speech, and carriage, of a human being who possesses or appears to possess a special gift, a special destiny, or distinctions or admirable qualities. Not every observer will perceive or credit those qualities, but those who do will romanticise, mythologise them, project them into the supernatural. They will love and revere the person they see in that light as long as the spell of his or her charisma lasts’ (Jaeger 2011: 34).

Charisma is therefore a rare, spiritual-like attribute that is not easily understood, yet its encounter can yield profound, inexplicable, and felt changes in bodies. It has been described as ‘an exceptional quality that a man has (regardless whether that quality is real, presumed or faked)’ (Weber 1996: 370). Furthermore, its seductive influence evades any rationale or logical process by which one might understand it. Dion and Arnould (2011) explore the notion of charisma as essential to the diffusion of artistic ideologies as part of a luxury retail strategy. The authors’ note how a brand’s creative director is imbued with magical powers of creation and transformation by virtue of her/his charismatic persona. Upon being culturally consecrated, her/his charismatic personality is granted ‘domination over men to which they submit because they believe in the quality associated with that person in particular’ (Weber 1996: 370). The charismatic individual becomes endowed with the capacity to provoke a ‘logic of adoration’ whereupon the ‘bewitched consumer becomes a willing adorer’ (Dion & Arnould 2011: 514). This ineffable, embodied, and affective energy is integral to consecration and subsequent deification as it bestows its bearers with an elevated vantage point of cultural legitimacy and authority.

When mediated by a charismatic intermediary, the spellbinding nature of charisma consecrates and confers legitimacy upon the consumption experience (Dion and Arnould 2011). Its capture in an image infuses the experience with an affective charge capable of forging an emotional connection with viewers. Furthermore, its evasion of cognitive logic and rationale ensures that it is consumed through embodies imagination (Joy and Sherry 2003). Affective imagery (Featherstone 2010) or charismatic art (Jaeger 2011: 2012) is thus a catalyst by which bodies experience the intensities of the ethereal world animated by cultural intermediaries. The affective response provoked upon experiencing these intensities transports bodies ‘into a world where human limits are a bolished, a t l east e xtended f ar be yond t he c ommonplace. T he spellbound person feels that redemption from misery or transformation from the commonplace is a vailable. T hat e xhilaration pr oduces e cstasy; i t g enerates i mages of door s t o hi dden
From this perspective, the evocation of charisma produces ecstatic consumption experiences during which the viewer stands outside themselves (Colpe 1987). It ‘creates the appearance of greatness or grandiosity in persons or world represented, makes them desirable, places them just beyond human and natural proportions, and inspires imitation in the viewer/reader’ (Jaeger 2011: 18). The provocation of an affective response by a charismatic persona invokes an altered state in bodies whereupon their perception of reality changes and they begin to recognize themselves in the image and likeness of (s)he that embodies this affective force (Monti 2012). James (1961: 55) also observes how intense emotions such as love, wrath, ambition or jealousy allow for the experience of a certain vitality and enchantment in life that cannot be logically deduced to a simpler form. Expanding on the ideas of the previous chapter, I argue that the animation of a fictional, thematic and affect-laden narrative/consumption experience necessitates a charismatic persona(s) to forge this emotional connection with the viewer.

In this sense, charisma is an affective trigger that stimulates a felt sense of aliveness and engagement with consumption experiences by provoking motions of desire, envy and belonging (Wissinger 2007b: 258). These intense emotions possess a mimetic nature which triggers vicarious consumption of alternate realities and emotional states (Girard 1977; Belk et al. 2003). In other words, the embodiment of such mimetic, affective stimuli by intermediaries triggers persons’ emulation of these beguiling personas and lifestyles (Belk et al. 2003). During the animation of an enchanting narrative, the charismatic persona of the cultural intermediary is ‘a mask that the grandiose assumes in order to appear real; it is a rhetorical trick to lure the reader/viewer into the belief that the hyperreal is real…’ (Jaeger 2012: 39). The mysterious qualities and affective capacities of this embodied force infuse the consumption experience, thereby preserving its artistic lineage while distinguishing it from experiences of the ordinary and mundane.

While we can only ever achieve a representation of that which we call ‘charisma’, of interest to this study of cultural mediation is the way this affective force is mobilised to animate an impactful consumption experience. As a quality evoked from within, I interpret charisma as inexplicitly linked to the accrual of various forms of capital rather than just ‘you either have it or you don’t’. This research argues that when intermediaries reflect on and mobilise the affective charge gained from intense past experiences, they are behaving charismatically, or
embodying the quality of charisma. This point is supported by Hemmings (2005: 564) who states ‘it is the reinvigoration of previous affective states and their effects, rather than affective freedom, that allow us to make our bodies mean something that we recognize and value’. This reinvigoration of affective states adheres to the point made in Chapter One, that advertising images create dreams by wrapping up emotions and ‘selling’ them back to the consumer in the form of a connection (Nelson 1983). The reinvigoration and embodied circulation of affect creates a tie that provokes consumers’ past memories and which ties bodies together. For bodies in relation, the affective response provoked by the flow of charismatic intensities ultimately ‘creates the illusion of full participation in a higher kind of life and a higher kind of world’ (Jaeger 2012: 19).

Importantly, the charismatic authority of intermediaries must be (re)legitimated through collective rituals (Dion and Arnould 2011). When intermediaries are (re)consecrated at various ceremonies, they become charged with greater cultural, emotional, social and symbolic capital and consequently, greater affective capacity (Wissinger 2007a). To extend our understanding of this non-discursive, embodied and ‘magical’ quality, this work thus conceptualises charisma as a rare affective capacity accumulated from deeply emotional, epiphanic experiences (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) which become mobilised through effortless styles of consumption and production. For example, while speaking to a successful model Henrik about the potentially damaging effects of rejection at castings, he inadvertently began to describe an epiphanic experience.

Henrik: Well…rejection and embarrassment isn’t the same thing, I think embarrassment is a much stronger emotion. It builds a particular type of character to be honest with you. There was one particular instance that comes to mind as a child. I was at the beach in Blackpool when I was 6 years old. We were packing up getting ready to go home and I think, I destroyed myself in sand, it was wet sand so it was stuck to me. So I took off my swimming shorts so they could be put in the bag and my father told me go wash myself off in the sea before I get into the car. So I was like, ‘ok, gimme back my shorts then and I’ll go wash off’. He was like ‘your shorts are destroyed just run down and wash off and come back to dry off and change into your clean clothes. It seems fairly logical and back then, it wasn’t really a massive deal to see some 6 year old run around like that you know, times were different. But for me, that moment was just… I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like…literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like…literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just… I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like…literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just... I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like... literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just... I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like... literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just... I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like... literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just... I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like... literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just... I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like... literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just... I just remember literally being scared stiff. Like... literally. There was a good 100 yards between us and the water. I was so scared that my legs literally wouldn’t move to bring me closer to the sea. The beach was still packed with people, it was just literally the most scared I’ve ever been. But for me, that moment was just...
around buck naked with a deranged smile on my face! [laughs] But when I got back to where we were, although I didn’t realise it at the time, those five minutes changed me. The initial embarrassment was so huge man, I can’t even explain it, I wanted to dig a hole and fall in. But when you have no choice but to break through that barrier, it just dissolves all of your shyness. There is great freedom and confidence that comes from that. I like literally it could never get any worse, trust me. That experience definitely shaped me. I’ll never again face that kind of embarrassment because I’ve let go, once you embrace it rather than allow it to frighten you, you do become larger than life…people can sense that from you.

I interpret this experience as being critical to Henrik re-invoking the magnetism he conveys on set. The loss of inhibitions resulting from an initially mortifying experience has shaped his habitus considerably. While he describes the event as liberation from a cognitive fear of embarrassment, the onset of similar circumstances or emotions today result in a similar reaction, thereby alleviating any potential restrictions (nervousness, anxiety, fear etc.). This ultimately results in a ‘freer’ bodily mode of expression and a greater capacity to modulate affective flow.

Similar to Henrik’s recollection, the affective charge that animates consumption experiences triggers similar emotional stirrings in relational bodies. Upon impact (an affective response), a connection is made whereupon the viewer believes in the transubstantiation of the experience. While speaking about his love of creating and telling stories with images, James describes how a moment on holidays impressed upon him, the capacity of affect to trigger emotion in others. Below illustrates an intense emotional connection felt toward a consumption experience with an affective image. In this instance, the family photograph is highly charged with affective capacity due to the ‘pure’ performance of those captured in the shot.

James: It all stemmed from my being a stubborn brat really [laughs]. I was on holidays with my family and cousins. We were around the pool…me, my little cousins and brothers were playing around in the kiddie pool so my mother wanted a group picture of us all with this expensive new camera she got. She gave it to my Dad and told him to take the picture. He reluctantly took it. For whatever reason he was already in a bad mood I think [laughs]. He tried to get us to calm down from splashing around and to line up properly for the photo. Of course this is much easier said than done, to round up a bunch of caffeine and sugar fuelled 6 year olds. So he tried but failed. After one more attempt he started to get splashed by our messing and we accidently wet the camera. He absolutely flipped out. Like, proper pissed off. He just took a picture of us messing about and stormed off in a right huff. He gave the camera back to my mother saying ‘here this’ll have to do’. But when we came home and got the whole bunch of photos developed, that was one of her favourites. It was this really cool image of all of us playing, splashing about the pool, with looks of pure joy on our faces. It made her cry tears of joy to see her boys so happy. She still gets a little choked to this day. And, I guess that’s the difference you know? I don’t want to create ordinary images. I mean obviously, it would have been a nice picture if my dad rounded us up, but, that’s all it would have been… nice. I will bet my life on it that it wouldn’t have made her cry. The best it would have achieved was a wry smile. You would have looked at it and it would have blended in with the other posed photographs. As we speak, it would be covered in dust in a cardboard box in the attic somewhere…I think it made her cry because you can feel us having so much fun you know? You can sense each of our
individual personalities based on what we’re doing in the photo. You don’t get that from a ‘say cheese’ image…that’s why it’s still hanging on the wall at home.

The forms of capital derived from these epiphanic experiences invest cultural intermediaries’ with tacit, embodied knowledge of how to perform when in various contexts (e.g. an abandoned warehouse, gritty sheets, dubstep music, themes of glam rock, lust, passion etc.). That is, their bodies remain open to being affected by the flow of energies from these different sources. This rarefied capital helps them develop an embodied ‘way of feeling’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962) for the particular shot which stimulates their inner reflection and subsequent mobilisation of affect. Similarly, when discussing the nature of a photogenic presence, Matt illuminates a pivotal, epiphanic experience.

Matt: I was never really what you might call photogenic growing up. I always tended to ruin the family photograph purely because I used to hate posing. It just seemed so boring and forced to me. Let’s all smile and pretend we are happy! It’s so ridiculous. There was one Christmas in particular where my parents were fighting like cats and dogs, it was brutal. They got divorced soon after. But we always got a Christmas picture taken every year, don’t ask me why, I guess something to do with tradition or something. But I was 13 at the time and I remember the appointment was at 2pm. We were in the waiting room, my folks started having it out again, I got upset and then we were called in. I just remember staring into the bright lens and the guy telling me smile, I just broke down in tears right in the moment as he took the picture. I remember him saying ‘oh we’ll have to try that again’. Eventually I pulled myself together and my folks got their Christmas photo for whatever it was worth. The next day my mum was shopping, and I ran in and asked for the initial image that was taken. He was going to throw it out! It was such a great image! I loved it, I still have it. Just my two parents pretending to be happy and the true feelings of a child…my eyes are so red, tears streaming from my face and I’m roaring, it’s just pure emotion really. It looks so artistic. But I often think of that moment during shoots today, because it is a great example of…you can’t fake it if you are going to make a great image you know? It has to come from inside you; it has to be raw emotion. I often think that if anyone saw the second picture of us all smiling, would they have known something was up or would they have been convinced we were a happy family? My guess is they would’ve known.

This piece is evocative of the idea that the model must become the character if (s)he is to mediate an authentic experience to bodies. Only then can an authentic and impactful connection be made. This point is supported by Featherstone (2010: 196) who explores the affective impact of consumer cultural imagery; ‘…complete transformation also requires something akin to a course in method acting, to learn to play the part of a new person one has elected to become. Thus a change in appearance must be coupled with an adjustment in how one perhaps speaks, walks, and how the person comports themselves generally. The goal is to possess a body and face that has the capacity to stop people in their tracks and make them take a second look, to make them want to verify, note and even record the persona which has instigated the shock of beauty’. For instance, Matt describes how he couldn’t hide his true feelings and pretend to be happy for a very brief moment. Instead, his authentic affective resonances of sadness and...
despair manifest in the creation of a ‘raw’ image that captures attention through the natural evocation of ‘pure’ emotion. Rather than pretend to convey particular emotions, these affective states must ‘come from inside you’.

Toward the end of the narrative, Matt interestingly questions the authenticity of the second image that would have resulted had he pretended to be happy versus the affective intensity of the initial image wherein his real emotions were triggered. It is therefore clear that in order to resonate with audiences, the evocation of ‘purity’ is essential if it is to provoke an affective response and trigger viewers’ belief in the authenticity of the consumption experience. Based on the above narratives, I argue that cultural intermediaries mobilise affect through their capacity to remain open to affect and being affected (Massumi 2002) by the continuous flow of affective energies that pervade the atmosphere as well as those existing in their habitus. This capacity is based largely on emotional capital (while other forms of capital are also inevitably involved) and derived from past affective experiences, the intensity of which ensures they remain constitutive of the model’s habitus.

5.3 ‘You can’t make yourself fall in love…’

The impact made by affective imagery is one that resides on a different register to beauty. Instead, it is felt through an embodied form of thinking and doing (Featherstone 2010). By virtue of the ‘primordial carnal bond between human beings’ (Crossley 1995: 57), the affective charge with which the consumption experience is endowed evades cognitive rationale and instead, forges an emotional tie between bodies and experiences. I identify the affective response to such impactful consumption experiences as enchantment; ‘a kind of magical fascination that captures us and breaks down our rational defences by engaging our imagination and our need to be rescued from the ordinary’ (Monti 2012: 2). In other words, the emotional connection made causes the viewer to construct a representation in her/his imagination using the affectively charged symbols and signs constitutive of the experience. In doing so, (s)he projects an ineffable aura of deification onto the consumption experience; ‘it is what rises up in the beholder’s mind from the scar of Odysseus, the cookie dipped in tea, or a t-shirt worn by Brando’ (Jaeger 2011: 34).

Walter Benjamin (1936: 338) notes that ‘to experience the aura of a thing means, to invest it with the ability to look back at you’. Aura is thus a projection of the viewer’s imagination having experienced the embodied disorientation evoked by an affecting presence (Jaeger 2011). The connection made by a charismatic persona ‘plants in the mind of the beholder the
fantasy of living at the same level of existence as a near supernatural being. The ability of objects or works of art (as opposed to duchesses and princesses) to stare back depends on a psychological preparedness in the viewer to vivify the object (Jaeger 2011: 27). In commandeering the imagination, fashion models’ mobilisation of intense affect obliterates viewers’ sense of logic, causing them to believe in the higher world conveyed. In committing to this belief, the viewer is exalted and recognises her/himself as belonging to the model life embodied by the intermediary. Thus, upon becoming enchanted, as my narratives will continue to illustrate, the viewer deifies that which inspired this affective state (Jaeger 2011) i.e. the consumption experience and its constitutive affective signs; model, clothing, persona, context etc.

Aura also relates to the artistic ideologies of high fashion in that it is provoked by a charismatic figure. The cultural intermediary and subsequent consumption experience upon which an aura is projected resembles a one-of-a-kind work of art that has not been reproduced (Benjamin 1936). Any reproduction would compromise the rarity of the experience and dilute it of its unique aura (Benjamin 1936). Thus, similar to a work of art, the affecting presence of the cultural intermediary evokes ‘an aura of authenticity which surrounds the original, non-mechanically reproducible work, endowing it with qualities of uniqueness, distance and otherness’ (Heilbrunn 1999: 189). Furthermore, the ineffability of its attraction confers an air of deification onto both the intermediary and consumption experience which raises it above the ordinary and empirical (Pickering 1984). An imagined aura conferred upon the experience ensures that it is not reducible to a rational understanding but instead, must be engaged with on an affective plain, as illustrated below.

Fiona: When you add that little bit of magic that a great model brings…it’s not just a picture anymore… it’s as if it is talking back to you. I always equate it to falling in love [laughs]. I’ve been married for twelve years, but even that…how do you explain falling in love to someone who has never been? Like, you can’t make yourself fall in love can you? It just happens. Even if you have a string of relationships beforehand, you tip along not really feeling anything too major and then all of a sudden you meet the one, and you feel completely different. Your entire world is upended. In that moment, you don’t feel the same as you did as in the minute previous. And…without sounding incredibly pretentious or self-indulgent…but when it all comes together in a shoot, that’s what it’s like…it’s overwhelming, you fall in love a little bit, well not a little bit, a lot! Don’t tell my husband [laughs]. But you can’t order that you know? It just happens, and when it does, it’s magical.

I interpret aspects of transubstantiation and deification in the above narrative, where having become imbued with affective intensity, the material object is transformed into something with emotional capabilities; ‘it’s as if it is talking back to you’. Yet, the overwhelming nature of the
impact or ‘conversation’ is such that Fiona is unable to cognitively articulate the precise emotional upheaval felt. Arguably, if she could articulate exactly what it was she found captivating about the experience, it would be deemed ordinary, rational and thereby compromise its enchanting capacity. Instead, she uses the intense emotional analogy of falling in love, which is very similar to the experience of charisma in that they are both embodied, non-discursive and generate feelings of intensified vitality (Monti 2012). The experience provokes her imagination and transports her to a place perceived higher than her current reality; ‘don’t tell my husband’. Her emotional response conveys intensified feelings of love and devotion combined with a mystified air, which results in the projection of deified aura onto the consumption experience. As I sat in her office, I thumbed through some old Polaroid’s until one in particular caught my eye35.

Fiona: Ah yes, that’s Ashley Stymest. He’s very striking isn’t he? What do you like about it?
PL: I don’t know…

Fiona: [laughs] Exactly! There’s just something there isn’t there? It’s that unidentifiable quality; I can’t explain why it is I like him either. But he just has this…hold over everyone he meets, I like Cara Delevingne or Kate Moss. His persona is just addictive. He is probably one of the most in demand models in the world right now. He just brings so much energy to shoots; he’s a handful but is always guaranteed to produce amazing shots.

PL: What makes him one of the most in demand models of the moment?

Fiona: I don’t know really [laughs]. He just embodies everything that a high fashion brand wants at the moment. He’s interesting to look at, versatile, charismatic; he projects incredible energy during shoots. He’s magnetic; you just can’t take your eyes off him. He’s the perfect embodiment of the high fashion lifestyle. It’s not really something you can explain you know? He has great energy, he just emits this aura, it’s strange…it’s inexplicable but it’s still an exact science. If a model can’t make me feel anything, someone who has worked in the industry over twenty years and knows fashion, then how is that person on the street going to feel anything you know? This was…in fact this may well have been his very first Polaroid. I can tell the very instant I lay eyes on the Polaroid that he has something special about him. But I mean…I can try to tell you what I find so striking about it…but fashion isn’t verbal [laughs]. No amount of words can articulate or replace emotion at the end of the day.

Neither of us uttered a word as her gaze remained pinned to the Polaroid. With eyes squinted and a wry smile, she stared at the Polaroid before looking back at me. I stared at her as we both burst into laughter at her incapability to articulate her emotion and my rational approach to requiring an answer.

Fiona: [Laughs] I mean…I don’t know…he’s not bad looking…but he’s not all that good looking either. He’s too boyish to be called handsome really. His nose isn’t perfect, it’s a little big. It works though. His charisma makes his look appealing. He’s not an Abercrombie & Fitch model and he never will be. This is a different lifestyle, one that

35 Appendix C
isn’t perfectly groomed you know? A high fashion model’s face is meant to emote, to express…rather than to just be ‘handsome’. He is just…as he is. I mean if his nose wasn’t slightly fat then it wouldn’t make his other features so noticeable. His facial symmetry is just very attractive to me. Skin is perfect. He doesn’t have any excess fat on his face so you can see his jaw line perfectly, his collarbone is sticking out, that’s really important, there has to be definition. He has a beautiful pillowed lip, which was one of the first things I noticed. His eyes are fantastic too; he just has this mischievous charm to him. Like… even in this picture you think he probably has something funny going on in his head and he is trying to contain himself from bursting out laughing. It’s charming and intriguing. His whole face draws you in to his story and seduces you.

In the above description, the model’s face is a site from which to animate an affective character and narrative. For instance, the model’s ‘little big’ nose deters an accusation of commercial handsomeness. His look is not one that adheres to the mainstream, corporate aesthetic of Abercrombie & Fitch for example. While these minor imperfections connote a naturalness that negates traditional beauty, they also occur within the ‘perfect’ frame exhibited by his jawline and skin. The model’s features are such that he does not appear primped or worked upon. Instead, he appears natural, ‘as he is’. Yet these elements are not intended to represent perfection but instead, are meant to affect. Synnott (1989: 607) observes the face is the only part of the body that is capable of displaying as many expressions as there are emotions. In her engagement with the Polaroid, Fiona begins to speak in terms of the affective capacities of the face. For example, the model is described as ‘charming’, ‘intriguing’ and ‘mischievous’ as though he can barely contain a secret and will erupt with laughter at any moment. These extrinsic cues are experienced as expressive of the mischievous character embodied by the model. I also found the idea of ‘imperfect perfection’ interesting and asked Fiona about the prevalence of cosmetic surgery in high fashion.

Fiona: Oh Jesus no, that’d be career suicide. If a model were to go injecting collagen into his lips or botox into his forehead he wouldn’t be able to express. He might look aesthetically ‘perfect’ but he would have no character about him… no soul.

The intermediary’s persona or ‘soul’, is constitutive of various affective attributes such as skin, jawline, eyes etc. which help enhance her/aesthetic capacity to animate a spiritual character. Described as ‘perfect’, the model’s skin depicts one who, while being a hedonist, still exerts inhuman control over his lifestyle of excess. As noted by Farber (2006:16); ‘in a culture governed by repression and release, the greater the subcutaneous layer of fat, the greater the loss of control is signified. Gain of fat alters the skin’s margins; age produces sagging and wrinkling, both of which affect the definition of a taut, contained bodily outline. In the war against nature to prevent the loss of slimness and youth, skin becomes a site of constriction, containment and control’. In the piece below, skin acts as a tableau on which to inscribe a
narrative. Models’ rare and effortless affective capacity to evoke a deified otherness is typified by the line; ‘not everyone can live this life’.

Fiona: Well it is indicative of a certain lifestyle isn’t it? I mean, you see some guys with chiselled jaws and they look good but you just know there was a huge amount of work in the gym behind that jawline. You can see some other guys with the same jawline and they just look malnourished, it’s not a attractive anyone. But the high fashion model, he has a chiselled jawline and no fat on his body naturally. Or because he doesn’t place a huge importance on food for happiness you know? Like going to the gym, counting calories, a military style regime, that’s not what high fashion is about. It’s about keeping this aura of mystery a round t he lifestyle you k now? T hat no t everyone can live this life. That’s what makes it so appealing and coveted. There is no mystery to the lifestyle of that gym guy, it’s up at 6am and cauliflower for dinner. In the same way there is no mystery with someone who carries a bit of weight. Well, we know what you were doing with your time don’t we? You were on the couch eating chocolate and ice cream. That’s not the type of look a high fashion brand wants to associate with. They want the edgy, mysterious, cheeky guy here because he projects the character of one who…we’re not quite sure where he is from, but there are clues to his character written all over his body… that we engage with… it makes you want to hang out with him and have what he has naturally.

Therefore, when we analyse ‘thin’, ‘fat’ or ‘muscular’ bodies, we are not discussing the molecular constituents that have caused weight gain or the physical expansive growth of muscle tissue. Instead, we are engaging with a narrative that has been written on the skin and reacting affectively to it. In other words, we are affected by how the visible skin has reacted to increased muscle size, fat etc. The skin, much like clothing as discussed in Chapter Four, is the corporeal clothing of the body and represents a text upon which we both inscribe and interpret stories (Patterson and Schroeder 2010). In the same way that tattooed women study represent nonconformity to traditional ideals of femininity (Patterson and Schroeder 2010), high fashion intermediaries embody ascendance to a ‘higher order’ (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006) and use their affecting presence to animate stories of consecration and deification. Similarly, as clothing can be removed, the emotional malleability of the body suggests that these narratives can also be changed by the chameleonic, affective capacity of intermediaries to shape prevailing taste.

As mentioned, when engaging with the affect-laden narrative embodied by the intermediary, those within whom an affective response is engendered deified aura onto the experience that evades rationale. In this case, a logical interpretation would insist that the pale, inelastic, scarred skin of the editorial model signals a lack of control, poor diet and inadequate consumption. One might interpret that there has been a general failure of the self to conform to standardised ideals of attractiveness (Bordo 1993). Yet, in high fashion, this ‘failure’ is consecrated and subsequently deified. As illustrated below, the aura projected is one of imaginative longing (Campbell 1987) for transcendence to this higher, fashionable lifestyle.
Fiona: He’s not meant to have control of his life. What’s so appealing or interesting about being in control [laughs]? There is no room for sensibleness or clean skin in high fashion [laughs]. But seriously, tattoos are actually becoming very popular in editorial modelling right now. Some models are actively getting tattoos just because they want to keep up with the trend. But tattoos are like clothing, you have to know how to wear them, if you can’t, they look awful. But for this model, it really works because he makes you believe that he got them for a reason. That they mean something to him. But as a viewer you are left to interpret the significance behind them. Although you can’t see it in this image, he has the name ‘Camille’ tattooed on his chest for example. Who is she? We don’t know but we are invited to imagine. They are another subtle clue as to his lifestyle.

There are again allusions to the commercial mainstream here by suggesting that many models are beginning to tattoo their bodies, thereby making it ordinary and traditional. However, tattoos, as a (generally) permanent fixture on the body retain their legitimacy due to the ‘reason’ for their existence. As narratives, these reasons are not logical but rather, are bound up in affective ideas and values. For example, the name ‘Camille’ suggests an emotional relationship with a female which immediately connotes mystery, sexual activity, love and passion. These various ‘reasons’ rarefy the intermediary as one who naturally belongs among the deified.

Fiona: He is just a natural, free spirit. There is clearly no conscious effort made to sculpt a ‘six pack’ or define arm muscles. The only way his arms are getting a workout is from lifting a beer. The fact that he clearly doesn’t worry about his body like most of us do makes him different. He enjoys life and damm the consequences. That kind of attitude is sexy and attractive for no real reason other than is just is. That’s why really nobody gave a toss when Kate (Moss) got in trouble. We knew she was at it anyway. Of course some brands had to withdraw their support for her but that was only to keep up appearances, they soon came back. The whole thing earned her more money and contractual work than anything else she has done. The only harmful thing about it was it slightly cast a harsh light of reality on the fashion world for a moment. All of these things, drinking, drugs etc. they are all best in the imagination. When the curtain is drawn back, the illusion is ruined and we get to see the nasty hangover, it tends to destroy the magic of the whole thing for a minute or two.

The affecting presence captured in the experience commands bodies’ attention while the affect-laden signs prvoke vi ewers’ i dentification w ith the imagined subject position/context animated. Interestingly, the furore that surrounded Kate Moss arguably rejuvenated her career, preventing it from becoming stale, and forgotten. However, upon receiving too much explicit exposure, there is a danger that the light of rationale and logic can enter to reveal ‘the hangover’. In this case, the sobering realisation that the model life is an illusory construct where corporate, strategic planning and foresight are veiled by a romanticised, mythologised narrative and marketed as ‘rebellious hedonistic freedom’.

Fiona: But at the end of the day, high fashion is aspirational… Fashion models embody that spirit of rebellion, of youth, and freedom that we all, to some extent attempt to cling
on to. They embody the spirit of high fashion... which is if we have those new shoes, that new dress, suit whatever it is... then everything is going to come together... that sounds like a sinister thing to say but it's not. That's the expressive, emancipatory power of fashion. It gives people confidence... so with this brand now maybe we won't be afraid to live the lifestyle we dare not tell our boss about in a way you know? We don't want to be in control, to be in routine, faced with crippling moderation on a daily basis. Who wants that? We want to be carefree, hedonistic, to completely lose our inhibitions forever not just on a Saturday night.

Evident from the above extract, the provocation of bodies’ desires for recognition is dependent on their engagement with charismatic figures that embody their deep seated aspirations. Cultural intermediaries are these figures. Their affecting presence ‘beguiles, rouses love and longing, enchants, and creates the illusion of full participation in a higher kind of life and higher kind of world’ (Jaeger 2012: 19). As illustrated by Fiona, they possess a unique capacity to animate a fashionable narrative and forge a connection via their unique personas. For instance, the energies mobilised by the affecting presence of the intermediary triggered Fiona’s imaginative longing (Campbell 1987) to inhabit a world where the dichotomy between real and illusion is blurred. The impact from consuming the affective image consequently enchants Fiona to project a deified aura onto the consumption experience through imagination.

5.4 ‘Jolted awake from the nicest dream…’

The link between charisma and aura is indistinguishable (Jaeger 2012) in that they both exist in the continuum of the affective connection mediated by arbiters of taste. As previously noted, the effortlessness with which they reinvigorate past affective states in vokes affective connections that audiences recognise and value (Hemmings 2005). While these emotional states are recognised, their impact is felt or experienced rather than rationally deduced. The affective tie forged alters bodies’ perceptions and triggers their engagement with these emotional states as inseparable from the consumption experience. The mobilisation of affect that makes this subtle yet, intensified connection necessitates two interrelated ‘laws of magic’ (Dion and Arnould 2011: 510).

The two processes identified are contamination by i) similarity and ii) contiguity. Adopting a luxury retail strategy perspective, Dion and Arnould (2011: 503) illustrate how luxury brands’ contamination by a charismatic creative director reproduces the aesthetic ideologies of luxury through the production of auralic qualities. Working on its initial conception by Mauss and Herbert (1902/1993), contamination by similarity occurs when a charismatically authoritative and legitimated person ‘lays hands’ on an object, thereby consecrating it (Dion and Arnould 2011: 510). Given the contagious nature of affect, contamination by similarity consecrates
clothing, images, architecture, art, restaurants, bars, music, surroundings, mundane consumption preferences etc. As illustrated by my data, the consumption experience (and aesthetic objects constitutive of such) that is contaminated by the charismatic persona (an effortless consumption and production style that mobilises affect) of the cultural intermediary provokes viewers’ projection of a deified aura that serves from the binary and uninitiated.

An extension to contamination by similarity, contamination by contiguity suggests that once contact has been made, the impact felt will endure (continue to affect the viewer) long after contact (Mauss and Herbert 1902/1993). To achieve contiguity, the consumption experience must become endowed with a rare affective potency. In other words, its intensity must be such that it lacerates bodies’ habitus’ through an intensified trigger of affective resonances resulting in a deep emotional attachment. From a strategic retail perspective, Dion and Arnould (2011) observe that luxury brands achieve contamination by contiguity through appropriating the principles of avant-garde art. The awe engendered by the aesthetic features of the store invoke imaginings in individuals whereupon they ‘see fictions and illusions merge with reality- and accept the effacing of that ordinarily un-crossable boundary’ (Jaeger 2012: 8). Successful contamination allows luxury brands to ‘bathe in the artistic ambiance’ which endures after initial impact (Dion and Arnould 2011:512).

Contamination caused by the mobilisation of affect transmutes the essence of the aesthetic object and is therefore integral to creating an affective tie between bodies and the consumption experience. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Helmut Lang, cultural intermediaries’ effortless circulation of affect contaminates the consumption experience with affective characteristics, which then attach to viewers’ dispositions as if by ‘magic’. To explore the ‘laborious process’ beneath the magic (Arnould 2004:52) of contamination, I focus on the ceremony of deification that is the fashion show while identifying the conduits that mobilise affect and animate a model life that beckons viewers’ participation.

Henrik: People say we are just clothes hangers which is absolutely rubbish. If that was the case, just put the clothes on a fucking hanger you know? Leave them off on a conveyor belt down the runway, see what the reaction is like. It really annoys me when people think they know about what I do when in reality they haven’t a clue… I went to a haunted house when I was 8 years old at a carnival in Brighton, fairly shoddy job. It was one of those ghost trains you know? Sat in with my sister and was going along nice and slowly. There was a lot of gothic, monstrous type imagery around; it was

36 Initially, I focus specifically on fashion models’ embodied performance (the walk) as that which mobilises affect before expanding my scope of this ceremony to identify the impact made by the aesthetic experience within this unique affective arena.
eerie but not really scary. But it was always that moment at the very end, the crescendo when the hand used to touch your shoulder. It always made me jump out of my skin! [laughs] It was probably just a guy in the dark or even a wind machine but I was convinced that there was a monster behind me attempting to drag me away… that was the scariest part, it always left my heart pounding…

Simon: Are you saying we’re monsters? [laughs]

Henrik: Well yeah, do you see my point though? Like the whole atmosphere is built up, but it’s only when someone jumps out of the dark that you feel…alive with fright you know? Your emotions are heightened by the imagery and all that…but it’s that touch…tips you over the edge and makes the whole experience memorable.

The ‘touch’ in this instance contaminates Henrik’s body and alters his perception of a ‘haunted’ house with intense feelings of fear and terror. The affective response leads him to believe there is an actual ‘hand…attempting to drag me away’. More specifically, the affective intensities invoked by the experience override his sense of logic and provoke his belief that something is real in imagination. The result of such an authenticated experience leaves him feeling terrified and his ‘heart pounding’. During a high fashion show, I interpret the model’s walk as equivalent to this ‘touch’. The difference between a model and a conveyor belt is that the latter is a machine and thus, incapable of producing affect. Its mobilisation is therefore fundamental if the consumption experience is to become contaminated and subsequently, the model life felt to be real. The affective capacity of this embodied process animates the narrative of the show, thereby authenticating the reality experienced by virtue of the affective connection felt upon intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect. The rarity of the experience endows it with special qualities that correspond to the authenticity and legitimacy of the model’s persona and lifestyle, as noted by Jonny.

Jonny: A model with a great walk is just something to behold. It exudes an energy that commands this hold over you…where you are just mesmerised by the effortlessness of it all. Obviously modelling is predominantly non-verbal but when a model walks the runway, models communicate more than words can… they are showing us their personality, their attitude…that they are strong, confident, in control… fashionable. That’s why I hate it when I hear of modelling agencies teaching their models how to walk in this generic, preconditioned way. I completely kill a personality or it personality that the model might develop. How can you teach personality? I mean, obviously there are similarities to every walk but it’s just that little change here or there that makes a model stand out from the rest. Like during New York Fashion Week, male models in particular have to walk quicker than usual. It’s a more fast paced jaunt down the runway generally because the theme of the show will be New York based so…hectic, busy, chaos etc. Paris on the other hand is a slower, withdrawn more fluid walk where the model looks like they are floating. The New York style for instance just fills you with energy; it evokes such vibrancy and aliveness. The Paris one is very ethereal, like I say they just float down the runway as though they have a pair of angel wings strapped to their backs.

That the walk is ‘something to behold’ elevates both those who perform and appreciate its mastery to this higher reality that is inaccessible to the majority. Appreciating this embodied
performance through a non-representational lens, I do not focus on the materiality of the walk but rather, on the affective intensities evoked by this rare consumption/production style (Holt 1998). The style of performance provokes imitation in affected bodies of the type of character that holds this enchanting grasp of her/his imagination. As further evidenced, the personality conveyed is also indicative of a certain context and place in the world i.e. New York, Paris etc. The affective connection felt upon contamination affirms both the intermediary and viewer’s legitimacy within this world. Furthermore, in the piece below, I spoke with Robert and his ‘muse’, Noel. It further illustrates the embodied process of contamination, and the change to perceptions upon an the provocation of an affective response.

Robert: My designs are not brash or loud. They are subtle, and kind of shy…so the walk doesn’t need to be this macho, confident, chest out look at me arrogant strut, I hate that. That’s not who I want modelling my collection. And that’s why I work with Noel here, because he embodies the spirit of my collection so well, he is effortlessly seductive. In fact in many ways, I would say he is responsible for my more recent collections…I wanted my designs to just have this subtle, shy, elusive, dreamlike feel to them. And for years I was trying to capture this but anytime I put them on a model, it just didn’t fit… the clothes didn’t speak to me on their bodies like I knew they could in my imagination. They had no personality, no soul. But Noel just seemed to get it. He could wear them in a way that captured the essence of what I was trying to communicate.

PL: What was the difference between Noel and the other models who didn’t wear your designs ‘right’?

Robert: Well, the first day I met him, it was at a fashion show where a bunch of friends and I were showcasing our batches of…not cheaper stuff but stuff that wasn’t necessarily right for fashion week…can I say leftovers?? [laughs] One of my models pulled out and I was one short so I asked some friends from the agency to send a guy over. He was like a frightened fawn, all skinny, hair covering his face, unsure of himself. He shuffled in with his head looking at his feet, shoulders hunched and hands glued to his pockets. It has already been a long day and when I saw him drag himself across the floor I thought; ‘oh for Christ’s sake, what have they sent me this waste of time and space for? Is this a joke? Because backstage at a fashion show is the most hectic hour you’ll ever have… there are people running around shouting, making sure everything is going to plan. And this guy was the complete opposite, just came in cool as a breeze. I was stressed so I think I snapped at him when I saw him just doing nothing; ‘can you walk!!?’ He said ‘yeah I walked here’. I immediately thought the guy was simple or something but I just shooed him off to wardrobe to get him ready. He took his shirt off he was this skinny waif of a guy, he was smaller than the model who pulled out so the jumpers hung on him more. I thought this is going to be an absolute disaster! I was considering not letting him out there when I saw him, the jeans were loose, the hair was a mess because he didn’t have time for styling but I had to let him go out or else the numbers would have been uneven. So I remember seeing them all in a line waiting to go out there. They all had their back to me [laughs] and Noel was the only one who was kind of fidgeting, pulling at the clothes you know? [laughs] I was like ‘what the hell?? Are you actually stretching my clothes!!?? [laughs]

Noel: I was just trying to get comfortable! [laughs]

Robert: Before it was his turn to walk I had to go around to stage side just to see how bad it was going to be. I had my eyes half covered and was peeping through my hands. He took his shirt off he was this skinny waif of a guy, he was smaller than the model who pulled out so the jumpers hung on him more. I thought this is going to be an absolute disaster! I was considering not letting him out there when I saw him, the jeans were loose, the hair was a mess because he didn’t have time for styling but I had to let him go out or else the numbers would have been uneven. So I remember seeing them all in a line waiting to go out there. They all had their back to me [laughs] and Noel was the only one who was kind of fidgeting, pulling at the clothes you know? [laughs] I was like ‘what the hell?? Are you actually stretching my clothes!!?? [laughs]
down the runway, my designs were hanging from his thin frame, the jumper stretched so that his collarbone was on show, the sleeves hung completely covering his hands. The way his body moved...he just embodied this effortless charisma...he had his hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched like a bold child sulking off to his room. He later told me that he only had his hands in his pockets to hold up his trousers that were coming loose but it worked! He was so enchanting...just floated down the runway. He gave the designs some attitude, some character that they had been lacking.

Noel: Well I loved the fact that they weren’t the favourite collection, that they were moments away from being thrown in the bin. Already that gave them some character in my mind, like nobody wanted them, it made them different. So they had to be worn like that, like some sort of cast-off fashion. I’ve always been pretty attuned to how to wear something to its best advantage ever since I was a kid. Because I grew up in a pretty big family. There were seven of us, four boys and three girls. We didn’t have a whole lot of money so hand me downs were the order of the day. And this is...you’re probably thinking this happened around 4 or 5, this was taking place up until 16 and 17 [laughs] so not so long ago! And there would always be fights over who got to wear what on a certain day and that kind of thing. And of course brothers being brothers were spiteful so if there was a certain day I wanted to wear a particular t-shirt, my other brothers would wear it or hide it or something like that so I just had to wear the next best thing. I remember even sharing clothes with my sisters now that I think of it [laughs]. In hindsight it prepared me well for a career in modelling because I learned how to wear something well...you know? Even if it wasn’t my first choice, I had to put up with it and wear it. I guess I just learned how to manipulate clothes.

Robert: In the end I was so impressed that I didn’t throw out those designs at all, I adjusted them and actually turned them into a new fall/winter collection with Noel and models like him at the helm...to date it’s one of my favourite collections.

This lengthy passage conveys important insights into contamination as that which charges a branded collection with affect, thereby endowing them with consecrated personality. For example, Robert describes his experience of observing Noel walk as epiphanic. For instance, he knew that his collection needed someone with an understated charisma to convey the qualities of subtlety, shyness, elusiveness etc. The moment during which he became enchanted by Noel’s affective capacity is a conversion experience for Robert (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). For Robert, Noel’s affective capacity communicated an ineffable distinction that distinguished him from others that had previously been modelling this collection. His rare style of wearing the collection animated a personality that ‘fit’ with the characteristics attempting to be conveyed. The fact that Noel’s walk was ‘inhibited’ by hitching up his trousers further emphasises the naturally occurring charismatic qualities of his rare affective persona. Yet in consecrating Noel, Robert is also consecrating his own collection due to contamination. This bestows affective characteristics of subtlety, bashfulness, humility etc. upon the collection that also preserve its deified aura. Ultimately, the personality conferred upon the collection is derived from the embodied rarity responsible for its contamination i.e. the cultural intermediary.
Similarly, Noel reinforces the aura by romantically mythologizing the collection. For example, that they ‘weren’t the favourite collection’ and were ‘moments away from being thrown in the bin’ endows these garments with a narrative that pitches it as ripe for subsequent transformation and triumph. Noel possesses a tacit understanding of ‘how to wear’ these creations in such a way that facilitates the mobilisation of affect and contamination of the consumption experience. Yet his ‘effortless’ capacity to produce charisma, while appearing innate, is derived from the various forms of capital (namely emotional, cultural, social and symbolic) accrued from sediments of past experiences (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Bourdieu 1984) that he also documents. For example, he romanticises his difficult experiences of living in a big family that did not have much money. I interpret these experiences as central to conferring him with the affective capacity to manipulate the character of clothing and wear it in a fashionable, charismatic way.

The final piece of Robert’s narrative illustrates the idea of transubstantiation (Bourdieu 1984) and how upon contamination with affect, the material garments were bestowed with a majestic personality. That is, they were not thrown out, but instead, transformed into a new fall/winter collection. It is clear from these narrative passages that effortlessly fluid consumption and production processes are integral to ensure the smooth mobilisation of affect and subsequent contamination of the consumption experience and aesthetic objects that constitute them. However, on occasion, there are instances where the ‘fit’ between a model’s tacit, embodied style of performance and the cultural milieu break down (Crossley 2001). Laborious processes that was once disguised as ‘magic’ and ‘effortless’ become exposed and consequently, the illusion is revealed. A visibly laboured process disrupts the seamless flow of affect and invokes different, negative emotions (embarrassment, awkwardness etc.) in relational bodies. Intermediaries’ cultural legitimacy is compromised as a result and they are proved to be mortal after all. The ethereality of the consumption experience is also shrouded in doubt as it instead becomes contaminated with adverse intensities and negative emotions as illustrated below.

Adele: Oh my days! Don’t even say the F word! [laughs] Falling is the worst thing that can happen to a model on the runway. It can end your career as a model in an instant. It has for some. Last year at London Fashion week there was a girl walking the runway in a floor-length dress and she caught her shoe in it, tripped and fell over. It was horrific. I think she continued on and walked back but as soon as she went backstage and took the dress off, she was done.

PL: Really? Why is it looked on so harshly?

Adele: Well models are supposed to be mesmerising… they are embodiments of a dreamt lifestyle that you want to have. So a model that floats down the runway and effortlessly wears the designs, you can’t take your eyes off them. They captivate your attention.
and they lull you into their fantasy. So now you can’t help but imagine what you would look like in those clothes, how they will transform you. With the brand behind you, now you’ll get that job you wanted, that girl you like will suddenly notice you, attractive people might glance at you on the street etc... Life as it was intended to be. But falling... that’s just... being jolted awake from the nicest dream and realising that that’s exactly what it was, a dream. After a fall, the model is seen as a pretender almost and the whole fantasy of this perfect life you imagined is shattered. The repercussions on the brand could be catastrophic.

When performed fluidly, the charisma evoked by an ‘effortless’ walk contaminates the consumption experience with intensities that enchant the viewer into a state of imaginative hedonism (Campbell 1987). In the embodied imagination of the viewer, the distinction between real and imaginary becomes blurred as (s)he exists in a higher, more authentic reality. In this transcendental state, the viewer is made to feel and subsequently believe through contamination, in the auratic qualities of the consumption experience. Conversely, the suggestion, or confirmation of effort made by falling demonstrates mortality and subsequently shatters the deified aura around the experience of the model life. In doing so, viewers’ desire and capacity to vicariously consume this representation is hampered. The affective capacities of models’ performances can therefore either bewitch viewers into believing in, and desiring the reality of the model life, or alternatively, can affirm the ordinariness and subsequent disenchantment felt in their present, mundane reality.

5.5 ‘A fashion show in hell... how perfect...’

The section above illustrates how the provocation of enchantment induces a magical fascination with (and in spires imitation of) the cultural intermediary and distinct world to which (s)he belongs (Jaeger 2012). While charisma is a human and physical presence, the affective capacity embodied by the charismatic persona of the intermediary transforms the aesthetic object(s) through contamination, which subsequently legitimates the consumption experience. In other words, upon being contaminated, the consumption experience (and aesthetic objects that constitute it) now embodies the auratic qualities of the deified persona that consecrated it. That is, post-contamination, upon the projection of aura, both the intermediary and consumption experience ascend to the ethereal reality of the model life. The cultural intermediary embodies an animated work of art, while the consumption experience mirrors an illusory, living being replete with affective characteristics and personality (Jaeger 2012; Monti 2012).

The ineffable process of transubstantiation which eludes rational cognition can only be explained as a form of ‘magic’, ‘evidence of contact with transcendent forces’ (Dion and

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37 Brand, collection, subjects, context, consumption style etc.
Arnould 2011: 504; Arnould et al. 1999; Belk et al. 2003; Joy et al. 2014). To describe this further, magical processes are ‘non-discursive, embodied acts intended to persuade an audience of the efficacy of performers’ words and deeds’ and thus, can only be performed by those with exceptional and rarefied affective capacities (Dion and Arnould 2011: 504). I interpret that the production processes that construct this magical veil around the sacred narrative of the model life occur primarily at the ritualistic ceremony of the fashion show. The show is a biannual, mediation ritual where belief in the imaginary dream of a transcendent reality is compelled and authenticated. Its purpose is to invoke a felt sense of vitality by connecting viewers with persons and forces beyond their earthly remit (Pelfrey and Hall-Pelfrey 1993: 309-310).

Nicholas: The fashion show is a cornerstone of fashion. The reason it is still around is the same reason anyone still goes to the theatre, cinema or a football match…to be entertained…to feel something. Fashion is much more than clothing. It’s…art. It’s a complete spectacle! That’s where Alexander McQueen was amazing…the shows. That guy was a genius at creating a spectacle with fashion. In my younger days I was doing an internship for Harper’s Bazaar and they brought me into the Alexander McQueen men’s show. Sitting right near the front. As we all waited the runway was covered by a massive black tarpaulin to make the suspense even worse. Then, like at the movies, the room went completely dark. You know that feeling you get when you are in the dark for a little longer than you anticipated and your eyes adjust to the darkness? Just as my eyes adjusted I began to feel the vibrations of the music starting to come on, the base was that heavy I felt it with my feet before I heard it I think [laughs]. After a couple of loud ‘thuds’, it graduated into this long, eerie melody. After the tarpaulin fell, the room was still in slight darkness but the lights began to brighten slightly and the runway was designed to resemble a dimly lit street. There were streetlamps lit by a flame like in the old fashion way. Then all of a sudden I saw a couple of flashes come from the photographer’s pit at the front and as the volume of that eerie tune elevated slightly the models began to walk. The whole theme of this Victorian London just came to life. It was like being transported to Whitechapel during the Jack the Ripper era. It was incredible, the designs just came alive! The models looked angry, their faces were snow white and they had red shadows under their eyes. Many of them wore top hats and carried canes but they were all immaculately tailored. Some wore three piece suits while others had a three quarter length fur coat draped over them. All of the shirts were pinned with a broach and didn’t have a full collar that made it look more old fashioned. I was amazed at how these guys managed to look so mean, and walk so well despite all of the flashing bulbs and prestigious people watching. Not to mention one of the best designers in the world is watching from backstage and you are wearing his creation! It was pure theatre. I felt like I was at the centre of the world.

Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) observe that visibility at London Fashion Week is central to affirming one’s belonging within this space where competition for cultural legitimacy is rife. At these shows, the seating plan is arranged so that those with the greatest cultural capital are reserved a view from the front row. Seats are therefore not ‘bought’, but earned through prestige
and affective capacity. The purpose of the ‘magical strategies’ displayed by the high fashion show is to animate an narrative of deification to the extent that it invokes a mesmerising, multisensory experience for bodies in relation (Joy et al. 2014; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). The affective response to such is one of awe, enchantment and adoration as the affective intensities of the show paralyse bodies’ sense of objectivity and rationale. The affective tie felt to the experience leaves bodies enthralled as they consume ‘the dream’ (Joy et al. 2014) of a transcendent reality.

Illustrated above are the various artistic manifestations of a Jack the Ripper/Victorian England style narrative have been appropriated to sacralise Alexander McQueen’s collection. The affective intensity of the spectacle provokes Nicholas’ affective resonances whereupon he consumes this experiential reality through imagination. In this sense, the animated narrative of the show acts as a substitute for desires and wishes that are forgone or forbidden (Best 2007: 506). Yet, if bodies are open to being affected, they can experience an artistic representation of these forgone wishes by consuming them vicariously in imagination (Goulding 2002). The various affective triggers (suspense, music, clothing, set design etc.) combined with models’ mobilisation of affect contaminate and frame the experience, while affirming its inseparability from the deified aura projected by the ‘dream artist’ spectator (Campbell 1987: 78).

Given its reliance on circulating affect to provoke embodied responses from those in attendance, the high fashion show is best described as a work of charismatic art (Jaeger 2011). That is, the dramatization, or animation of culturally significant narratives of deification and transcendence ‘create a magnified, exalted semblance of life. Its basic impulse is to create a world grander than the one in which the reader or viewer lives, a world of beauty, sublime emotions, heroic movies and deeds, godlike bodies and actions, and superhuman abilities, a world of wonders, miracles, and magic— in or der to dazzle and a stonish the hum bled vi ewer an d l ift hi m, b y emulation or e nvy, up t o t he l evel of t he w orld or he ro r epresented’ (Jaeger 2011: 41).

Illustrative of this point is an example of how the mobilisation of affective intensities transforms ordinary narratives to embody sacralised, epiphanic moments that have a profound impact on bodies.

38 For example, the presence of Anna Wintour (Chief Editor Vogue Magazine) in the front row will bestow significant cultural value and affective capacity onto a fashion collection due to its ability to merit her time and attention.

39 The various conduits through which affect is filtered and mobilised to create an impactful aesthetic experience that provokes a response from bodies.
Suzanne: Oh my God, did you see Louis Vuitton’s show in Paris this year?

Nicholas: You've told me already! [laughs] Stop I’m going to get jealous again!

Suzanne: [to me] It was the most amazing show I’ve ever been to, show of the season without a doubt. It took place in the Louis Vuitton Foundation…it’s a newly built museum worth €143 million…just this breath-taking architectural monstrosity made of glass curvatures built on the lake Bois de Boulogne in Paris. Gehry said he wanted it to mirror the Grand Palais. It really is palatial. It looked just incredible and with the sun glistening off the water, it looked like Mount Sinai! I can’t tell you how many pictures of it I have on my Instagram, all of the angles were impossible to catch, you’d never get tired of walking around it. But as the show was about the begin, we made our way down this elegant maze of mirrored corridors until we reached this dark basement with transparent screens for walls. I could vaguely make out the seating arrangements because the only lighting was the runway lit by beams of light. I was like we were on another planet, I’ve never experienced anything like it. Then without warning, the transparent screens lit up and different models’ faces delivered this welcome monologue ending it with ‘the journey starts here’. Their voices were soothing yet somewhat eerie at the same time. Then the sound of silence played over the speakers and the show got underway. The collection was just incredible, the new Louis Vuitton logo was unveiled on the designs too, a lot of people were unsure or anxious about it but by the end, between the venue, the choice of music, the casting of models, the believability of the entire experience made it unforgettable for me. It was like the most wonderful dream come to life. The only down side is that I'm expecting the same with every show I go into and I know I'll ultimately be disappointed. [Ugh!] I want to go back there; I want to live there forever! [laughs].

The extract above illustrates how the transcendent experience can become the new basis for reality (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The affect laden, intensified power of the experience overwhelms Suzanne’s senses and objective perception of reality as illustrated by her comparison to ‘Mount Sinai’ and ‘another planet’. The affective intensities, which are wrapped in a veil of artistry and mysticism, disguise any ties to a corporate orientation, while also blurring the line between real and imaginary. Her attention is arrested as her experience of the charismatic art (Jaeger 2012) triggers euphoric emotions; ‘it was like the most wonderful dream come to life’. Through embodied imagination, she consumes the transcendent world on offer while escaping the unbearable and mundane reality that would otherwise lie in wait; ‘I want to go back there…I want to live there forever!’

Also illustrated by the above narrative is the idea that consumption of an animated narrative is a spiritual experience as our souls coalesce with the soul of the brand (Cornfield and Edwards 1983). This affect-laden narrative of deification generates awe through appropriating avant-garde ideologies of art and magic rather than seeking to establish community (Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). For example, most fashion shows are in fact produced at a loss for the brand (Entwistle & Rocamora 2006). High fashion brand Dolce & Gabanna reportedly sells 75% of their new clothing line before it is ever showcased on the runway (Mears 2011). The
show in this sense is purely a ritual of consecration designed to animate a narrative of deification while reinforcing the cultural authenticity and rarity of the model life consumption experience.

The mobilisation of affect that animates the dream narrative enchants bodies in relation while simultaneously perpetuating the rarefied, commerce-averse (McRobbie 2003; Mears 2010), avant-garde aesthetic of the field. For art, as Schroeder (2002) argues, represents one of the highest goals of individuals. There is a distinct correlation between high fashion and art as both are becoming ‘indistinguishable from lifestyle culture as the logic of fashion dominates how art is made visible’ (Charlesworth 2003:3-4). Thus, in an affective economy where value is detached from rationality and objectivity, art has become ‘just another word for branding’ (Twitchell 2004: 239). High fashion institutions no longer adopt a rt as a t heme (Dion & Arnould 2011) but rather, embody the spirit of art in their very constitution (Joy et al. 2014).

Furthermore, as art is produced by those recognised as culturally legitimate (Bourdieu 1993), cultural intermediaries who ‘innately’ embody and diffuse these values and beliefs at high fashion shows become culturally consecrated a nd deified as thereal beings for their rare capacity to weave this dream narrative. In doing so, the affective tie forged by their affecting presence authenticates the narrative and grants mere mortals the capacity to dream through vicariously inhabiting this life.

Clare: Fashion is supposed to be over the top, it has to push boundaries of taste but also has to be entertaining you know? It shouldn’t be boring. Marc Jacobs’ typifies what fashion should be in my opinion. He has this charisma that makes you trust him and his collections. I feel so safe in his designs. What I like most is how he injects personality into his shows. They just have this aura about them, they just suck you in, they’re amazing...I saw his S/S collection this season and it was simply beautiful. The different syles were a mazing but it was ab out more t han t hat. It was the whole atmosphere; there was just a wonderful theatricality to the entire show. The girls had this awesome energy, the way their makeup was done they looked a little off focus, edgy looking. They were like the actors playing a role, making the idea or vision of the show come to live. As stylists, we have to get their costume ready so that they can give a convincing performance; it’s a lot of teamwork. He used music by The Doors and each song corresponded to a different look walking the runway, he was telling a story in a way you know?

PL: What was the story about?

Clare: It was about death and the end of the world, judgement day, the apocalypse, the valley of ashes and all that stuff! It was eerie but so compelling. It was like the entire crowd were already in hell, there was a sign over the runway ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter…’ A fashion show in hell [laughs], I just love that idea, how perfect!? [laughs]

Much like the narrative of ‘Jack the Ripper’ or ‘Mount Sinai’, I interpret the theme of Marc Jacob’s show as inspired by the epic poem ‘Dante’s Inferno’. Attachment to these culturally significant narratives anchors the brand in the art world, thereby distinguishing and emancipating it from the ordinary. As argued by Simmel (2004: 473); ‘all art brings about a
distancing from the immediacy of things; it allows the concreteness of stimuli to recede and stretches a veil between us and them just like the fine bluish haze that envelopes distant mountains’ (transl. Bottomore & Frisby 2004). The exaggerated theatricality of the show wraps an ethereal veil around the consumption experience. The enchantment felt upon experiencing the flow of affective intensity envelops the viewer into the dreamt subject position/context of the narrative, thereby legitimating the authenticity of the imagined experience.

Similar to the world of avant-garde art, cultural intermediaries of high fashion are ‘sorcerers’ (Belk et al. 2003) that have become endowed with magical powers by virtue of their continual consecration (Bourdieu 1985). In other words, ‘not just anybody can be a magician; the magician possesses qualities that distinguish him from common men’ (Mauss and Herbert 1902/1993: 19). Toward the end of the show, the fashion models followed by the creative director float down the runway once more to the rapturous applause of their peers. With their consecration complete, they are no longer thought of as designers or models. Having contaminated the consumption experience with an ineffable aura of deification and magic, Jacobs is heralded an artist and the models, his ‘muse’. Rather than showcase a new collection of clothes, these artists (Joy et al. 2014), sorcerers (Belk et al. 2003) and magicians (Dion and Arnould 2011) have animated a magical and affect-laden story of transubstantiation and transcendence. And thus, the mythical veil continues to enshroud these cultural intermediaries as they become deified for transforming fashion into ‘something more’ as if by ‘magic’.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored how consecrated intermediaries mobilise affect to frame the experience of high fashion as ethereal, authentic and desirable. To do this, I divided my chapter into two relevant parts. Firstly, I examined the consumption experience of affective imagery and secondly, depicted the fashion show as a ritualistic ceremony during which circulation of affective flow animates a narrative deification that impacts bodies in relation. My presence at a high fashion shoot for Helmut Lang allowed me to experience the mesmerising and explosive energy conveyed by cultural intermediaries as they work with imaging technologies to create affective imagery. I categorised this contagious, non-discursive, affective energy as charisma. Charisma manifests itself as a spellbinding quality or ‘special gift’ (Jaeger 2012) that endows the bearer with ‘magical powers’ of influence over those with whom (s)he engages. Its affective impact is such that it triggers a felt sense of vitality or aliveness (Wissinger 2007a) in the
viewer, whereupon they believe in the authenticity and reality of the consumption experience.

I have interpreted that charisma is evoked through intermediaries’ reinvigoration of past affective states felt during *epiphanic experiences* (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). My participants detailed various experiences, the intensities from which continue to constitute their habitus and thus, influence their embodied ways of being and acting (Bourdieu 1984). Upon being captured in an image, I interpret the affective response to charisma as enchantment. The viewer’s imaginations is commandeered as (s)he projects an ineffable, intensified aura (described by Fiona as similar to falling in love) onto that which triggered this affective state. Through embodied imagination, the viewer vicariously consumes the higher or der authenticated by the experience. Upon discussing a particular Polaroid image, I interpreted a premium on purity and effortlessness in order to animate the consumption experience and frame it as belonging to a higher, more authentic reality; the model life.

I discussed the fashion show as a ritualistic ceremony during which cultural intermediaries’ status as deities is reaffirmed. Furthermore, the consumption experience of the show is transmut ed through contamination with an intermediary’s affecting presence. That is, the intermediary’s effortless, embodied performance (the walk) mobilises affective intensities that impact bodies in relation, thereby impacting their dispositions and leaving them spellbound. This ritual is also steeped in avant-garde artistic traditions. The laborious processes (Arnould and Price 2004) that transmute viewers’ perception of the experience are disguised by the ineffability and artistry of their embodied performance. The experience is then bestowed with the affective qualities and capacities of the deity that contaminated it. Viewers thus consider the transubstantiation of the high fashion consumption experience ‘magic’. In performing this magic, intermediaries reaffirm the reverent, deified aura that enshrouds the experience and in doing so, compels further belief in the transcendent reality of the model life.
6. Discussion

Morpheus floated on noiseless wings through the murky darkness, and soon he arrived in the city of Trachis, where, doffing his wings, he assumed the form and likeness of Ceyx. Sickly pale as a lifeless corpse, and wearing no clothes, he stood at the foot of the wretched Alcyone’s bed. His beard appeared to be dripping, and sea-water might have been flowing in streams from his sodden locks.

Ovid XI: 455.

6.1 Introduction

In a late capitalist era of ‘imaginative hedonism’ (Campbell 1987), the consumption experience animated by cultural intermediaries of high fashion evokes an existential ‘purity’ (Bourdieu 1985) that evades capture by rationale and cognitive elements. The stimuli suffused within the experience affect bodies, causing them to imaginatively inhabit a ‘distinct world’ (Wagner 1999) uninhibited by the constraints imposed by objective reality. While this work has made theoretical linkages to the consumer, my core focus has been to explore the consumption and production processes of cultural intermediaries in the creation of these stimuli that animate narratives of consecration and deification to enchant bodies in relation.

I have adopted a non-representational (Hill et al. 2014) mode of theorising cultural intermediaries’ processes. This approach embraces the ineffable influence of the affective intensities that pervade the atmosphere and shape the taste and dispositions of bodies in relation through impact. Supported by bouts of personal introspection, I implemented a narrative approach to help understand these processes. The core research question posed by this inquiry is; how do cultural intermediaries mobilise affect? As evidenced by my empirical data, fluid circulation of affective flow is critical to animating a provocative narrative as the contagious nature of affect triggers an emotional upheaval within those affected. Bodies are enchanted to believe in the ‘magical’ authenticity of the consumption experience and furthermore, in their own belonging to the model life.

To stabilise the research aims that constitute this exploration of cultural intermediaries, I chose to adopt the cultural mediation framework offered by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012). In
doing so, three sub-questions emerge. Firstly, **how does cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect frame the consumption experience?** In other words, how do cultural intermediaries legitimate the consumption experience of high fashion as pure, authentic and desirable? Secondly, **how do cultural intermediaries develop the expertise for the mobilisation of affect?** To create an impact, circulation of affective flow must be felt to be fluid and effortless. Given that only a rare few can mobilise affect to a degree that influences bodies in relation, significant expertise is required which distinguishes cultural intermediaries from ordinary individuals. The final sub-question to be addressed concerns the nature of the affective response of bodies. I ask; **can we identify the impact made by the mobilisation of affect?** Again, while I have only made theoretical linkages to the consumer, I posit that we can identify impact based on the affective response of bodies in relation, which in this case, are fellow tastemakers within the field.

In the following sections, I present two core contributions of my research combined with a further potential contribution. To begin, I filter my research findings through the cultural mediation framework (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012) to address my core research question and the three sub-questions that underpin its articulation. While the data presented in Chapters Four and Five speak to these research questions, it should be acknowledged (as Smith-Maguire and Matthews also do) that the three dimensions of cultural mediation are not mutually exclusive, but rather, are co-dependent and interlinked. As such, instances of ‘framing’, ‘expertise’ and ‘impact’ simultaneously pervade Chapters Four and Five from beginning to end. Furthermore, the theoretical frame used to address the three sub-questions is presented with the purpose of offering a greater elucidation of the core question posed by this research and hence, establishing incremental theory development regarding cultural intermediaries.

Following this, I present a second contribution which extends the current conceptualisation of ‘the model life’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007) to incorporate the non-representational aspects of consumption and production that hold a tight influence on consumer behaviour. Finally, I offer a potential contribution that seeks to encourage a re-conceptualisation of how we understand cultural intermediaries’ role in contemporary consumer culture, which has largely been attributed to meaning transfer (McCracken 1986). I argue that the addition of affect combined to the theoretical framework adopted (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012), we begin to understand important aspects of cultural mediation that we would otherwise miss from the dominant representational approach.
6.2 How do cultural intermediaries mobilise affect?

As illustrated by Chapters Four and Five, to offer a robust definition of affect is redundant as different conceptualisations abound within the various fields in which it is theorised. Rather, as Blackman and Venn (2010) note, a more appropriate means of conceptualisation would derive from asking; what can affect do relevant to our specific theorising. In the case of cultural mediation, further understanding of affect facilitates an appreciation of the ineffable intensities and forces that animate the consumption experience and link bodies based on shared affective commonalities (Crossley 1995; Elliott 1997; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

In doing so, the affect mobilised by cultural intermediaries’ shapes embodied dispositions and tastes toward the consumption experience of high fashion. A non-representational approach to this question considers cultural intermediaries not just as containers of symbolic values (Soley-Beltran 2004), but as conduits for the flow of affective energies. That is, based on their unique habitus, cultural intermediaries are adept at opening their bodies to affect and being affected. Thus, their affective bodies are conceptualised as an assemblage of consumption and production processes that constitute their rare ‘fashion habitus’ (Bourdieu 1984; Enwistle 2009).

Based on my empirical data, I interpret the conduit that facilitates the mobilisation of affect as the ‘look’. Interchangeable with the concept of ‘fashion habitus’, I conceptualise the look as an assemblage of consumption and production processes, personalities, experiences, affective states, cultural and emotional capital et c. t hat become r einvigorated d uring an ef fortless circulation of affective flow. Combined with their reflection on emotional capital accrued from past subjective experiences, intermediaries’ capacity to mobilise affect subsequently trigger consumers’ aspirations, fears and desires (Smith-Maguire 2008) is also dependent on becoming ‘spiritually consecrated’ (Bourdieu 1985).

As demonstrated by my data, this leads to them being endowed with greater cultural legitimacy by gatekeepers at various high fashion ‘ceremonies’. The effortlessness with which these fashion habitus’ circulate affect animates a narrative of deification wherein their lifestyle (the model life) is mediated to audiences; ‘the cultural intermediary’s personal taste, cultural capital and lifestyle are necessary for their production of cultural goods, bestowing legitimacy on both the specific products they endorse, and their general authority as arbiters of taste and style’ (Smith-Maguire 2012: 219). To establish incremental theory development, I apply the
theoretical framework of cultural mediation (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012) to further elucidate on the three main constituents of this core research question.

6.2.1 How does cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect frame the consumption experience?

To briefly reiterate, framing is the process whereby the consumption experience is contaminated with affect, resulting in its animation and subsequent authentication in the imagination of bodies through the affective tie created. Dion and Arnould (2011) also acknowledge the importance of framing as those processes that consecrate the charismatic authority of a creative director. In this sense, framing involves ‘performing of actions in conformity with generalised notions of artistic behaviour’ (Dion and Arnould 2011: 507). Framing therefore endows the consumption experience with auratic qualities by virtue of the upheaval felt by bodies in relation, causing them to project an aura of deification upon the cultural intermediary and their unique world. Adopting the form of a deity, the cultural intermediary is conferred with the ‘magical’ capacity to transmute consumption experiences from mundane and ordinary, to intensified bouts of enchantment that belong to the distinct, higher order of the model life (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008; Dion and Arnould 2011).

During my initial conceptual expansion of framing in Chapter Two, I articulated five forms of labour as delineated by extant fashion literature (Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2002; 2009 Mears and Finlay 2005; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Soley-Beltran 2006; Mears 2008; 2009; Entwistle 2009; Wissinger 2007a; 2007b; 2009; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011; Rafferty 2011; Czerniawski 2012; Entwistle and Mears 2012; Jones 2013). However, my empirical research suggests that the boundaries between one form and another are ill-defined and not mutually exclusive. The conceptualisations are too numerous and in some cases, do not require separation. Furthermore, all five of these concepts have been imported from service, new media and retail literature. They have been applied as though in their native context, which creates discrepancies. This has led to a disparate understanding of cultural intermediaries’ impact on consumption.

For instance, both immaterial and entrepreneurial labour, while potentially offering some insight into the nature of cultural mediation, predominantly serves representational categories. That is, they do not provide any real insight into the embodied processes that mobilise affect. As such, they are best understood as umbrella terms which merely describe some elements of
cultural mediation in aesthetic industries such as high fashion. Further empirical research is required in order to fully articulate the descriptive nature of entrepreneurial work in an affective economy. Attributing any greater value to these labour forms only serves to clutter the space for development of empirically supported theories around cultural mediation. Furthermore, I interpret from my non-representational theorising of cultural mediation that aesthetic, emotional and affective labour are not mutually exclusive but rather, constitutive of the processes required to mobilise affect and frame the consumption experience for bodies in relation.

For instance, a conceptualisation of aesthetic labour through a non-representational lens appreciates intermediaries’ way of consuming (Holt 1998). That is, an intermediary’s look is conceptualised as an innate, fluid and stylised consumption performance that mobilises affect and creates social relationships. The emotional work underpinning the look (or aesthetic labour) is described by Mears and Finlay (2005) as the induction and suppression of emotions to impress others. A non-representational approach would extend this idea further by arguing the suppression and induction of emotion is performed with the purpose of circulating intensities that invoke an affective impact. The emotional tie created by intermediaries’ embodiment of affective stimuli connects bodies in relation based on the trigger of affective resonances. Therefore, given intermediaries’ overall objective of framing the consumption experience, I argue that both aesthetic labour and the emotional aspects underpinning this process would be best articulated as encapsulated within affective labour.

Affective labour merits far more attention than it has been attributed in fashion literature (Wissinger 2007a; 2007b). An explanation for its current lack of coverage has been both its similarities to emotional labour and perhaps, an over reliance on representational approaches that have focused on emotion at the expense of the interrelationship between affect and emotion. Yet, in her paper, Wissinger (2007a) does acknowledge that affective labour is far more descriptive of what fashion models actually do. As noted in Chapter Three, given that both emotion and affect are integral constituents of the consumption experience, emotion is best described as an affective function (O’Sullivan 2001). As such, both emotional, aesthetic and affective labour are inextricably linked (nay, they are the same thing) where cultural mediation is concerned. That is, culturally consecrated styles of consumption and production within high fashion legitimate the model life reality as authentic and desirable. By attributing

40 Such as an ethnographic study, observation, interviews etc.
a non-representational approach that focuses on the processes of consumption and production\textsuperscript{41}, we begin to better understand how affect frames the aesthetic consumption experience.

Further to this point, I posit that cultural intermediaries’ affective labour frames consumption of an imitated representations of the model life as spiritually pure, aesthetically rare and culturally legitimate experience. The contagious, affecting presence of the look embodied by cultural intermediaries through affective labour mediates these experiences beyond the boundaries of commonality and rational deduction. Instead, the rarity of the look evoked by cultural intermediaries’ ‘effortless’ affective labour frames the experience of the model life as ‘a distinct world’ (Wagner 1999) based on the affective response felt by bodies having experienced a narrative of consecration.

The concept of ‘effortlessness’ is vital as it frames this narrative of consecration with experiences of ethereality, purity and extraordinariness. The affect-laden narrative invokes an ineffable sense of difference in bodies as it becomes detached from ordinary emotional experiences associated with the traditional, mundane and routine. The incomparable, enigmatic and deified aura projected by enchanted bodies onto the experience derives from cultural intermediaries’ capacity to frame the experience in such a way that it appears new and ethereal to the senses. The chameleonic capacity of cultural intermediaries to animate various personas through the manipulation of affective flow produces intensities that are perceived differently based on the context in which they are mobilised. This ultimately frames the consumption experience of high fashion as new and belonging to a proximate future (Blumer 1969). The cultural rarity of the experience causes affected bodies to further project connotations of otherness and distance upon the experience.

A further aspect of framing is articulated by Bourdieu (1984: 365), who observes that cultural intermediaries ‘sell so well because they believe in what they sell’. That is, cultural intermediaries exhibit adamant belief in the authenticity of their ‘special powers’ stemming from ceremonies of consecration. This belief is also described as illusio (Bourdieu 1984; Crossley 2001), which insists that cultural intermediaries’ believe in the fictive, manufactured magic to the extent that it mirrors reality. ‘Magic’, as noted in Chapters Four and Five, is an

\textsuperscript{41} The constituents of aesthetic, emotional and affective labour that are directed toward the mobilisation of affect will henceforth be conceptualised as ‘affective labour’.

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aesthetic value bestowed on cultural intermediaries by virtue of their affecting presence and subsequent consecration (Bourdieu 1993). In high fashion, ‘magic’ lies in cultural intermediaries’ capacity to mediate this belief or ‘collective misrecognition’ to bodies in relation via an affective connection. Also referred to as ‘self-deception’ or ‘self-mystification’ (Bourdieu 1998; Dillon 2001; Schroeder 2002), cultural mediation of illusion is therefore integral to the reproduction of the authenticity of ‘the dream’ (Bourdieu 1985; 1993; Rocamora 2002; Joy et al. 2014). Cultural intermediaries’ contagious ‘misrecognition’ of their labour as ‘natural’ anchors a belief in high fashion as ‘art’ and thus, frames the consumption experience as magic, the real and spiritual. On the other hand, to convey doubt through embodied ‘breaches’ (Thrift 2010) in performance (leading to mobilisation of negative affect) is to expose the laborious processes (Arnould and Price 2004) of this ‘artistic’ and ‘magical’ endeavour.

Specifically, I interpret illusion as animated and legitimated by models’ affective labour. That is, even narrative is in itself a form of affective labour. While perhaps not “true”, the stories told by these cultural intermediaries remain credible due to their affective labour/intensified belief in the ‘magic’ of high fashion. For instance, illusion is manifest in their narratives of ‘effortlessness’ and ‘predestination’ as well as their blatant disavowal of any attachment to market capitalism. I interpret the belief to which Bourdieu (1984) refers, as correlative to terms such as ‘depth’, ‘magic’ and ‘etherality’ mentioned by my respondents. That which distinguishes a consumption experience as a sublime rarity is the ‘depth’ from which affective resonances are reinvigorated and the subsequent intensity with which they legitimate the experience by making bodies feel. Cultural intermediaries’ evocation of depth (or similarly, the reinvigoration of deep affective states) afflicts bodies in relation with a spirited vitality that characterises the narrative of consecration told as belonging to a higher order of experience. The inability of audiences (including other cultural intermediaries) to rationally articulate the framed narrative that has altered their dispositions, causes their conscious minds to elevate that which they have experienced to ‘the dream world of imaginary beings’ (Rocamora 2002: 350) where they are only explicable by the equally ineffable terms of ‘art’ or ‘magic’.

6.2.2 How do cultural intermediaries develop the expertise for the mobilisation of affect?

Cultural intermediaries must possess a rare degree of expertise if they are to mobilise affect and frame the consumption experience as pure, rare and legitimate. The possession of such facilitates a fluid mobilisation of affect that in turn, transmutes the consumption experience to a higher realm of ‘art’ or ‘magic’ as described above. I conceptualise expertise as affective
capacity that is perceived as natural or innate, yet, is determined by one’s habitus (Bourdieu 1984). It is therefore predominantly learned from past affective experiences and events. Primarily, expertise differentiates cultural intermediaries from ordinary individuals based on the cultural legitimacy and authority bestowed upon them due to their rare affective capacity. While Smith-Matthews and Maguire (2012) suggest two forms of expertise (professional and personal), my empirical findings extend these offerings by delineating how expertise is developed to the extent that it can alter bodies’ dispositions and shape aesthetic taste. I posit that expertise in cultural mediation stems from rarefied stocks of the various forms of capital identified (cultural, emotional, embodied, social, symbolic). To articulate this concept, I introduce the two sources from which these forms of capital or expertise are developed. The first of which is the amassment of cultural, social and symbolic capital based on consecration and the second, the accrual of largely emotional capital through epiphanic experiences.

Firstly, in a field of restricted production such as high fashion (Bourdieu 1985), where the commodity to be mediated is a culturally rarefied and distinct world of privilege, cultural intermediaries must be culturally legitimated at the hands of gatekeepers. Bourdieu (1985) observes how agents of cultural institutions such as high fashion reproduce the legitimacy of the field and those within it through consecration. Consecration endows agents with distinction along with the ‘cultivated disposition’ to decipher and enjoy the ineffable charms of the field (Bourdieu 1985: 23). That is, consecration legitimates intermediaries’ capacities to animate aesthetic experiences and also produces consumers capable of making sense of, and consuming these experiences (Bourdieu 1985).

From an intermediary perspective, consecration endows models’ with cultural authority and divinity by virtue of their charismatic persona (Bourdieu 1985). This ‘adds weight and credibility to cultural intermediaries’ attempts to influence others’ perceptions of what are, and are not, legitimate choices and tastes’ (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012: 556). Cultural intermediaries’ rare affective capacity bestows further credibility onto the experience due to its intensification of the emotions felt by bodies during the consumption experience. In this sense, cultural intermediaries are embodiments or ‘proof’ of the authenticity of consecration. The creation of an affective tie provokes a belief from bodies in relation in the spiritual consecration that has taken place and ‘aims at ensuring the ontological promotion and the transubstantiation’ of the consumption experience (Bourdieu 1975: 28).
Furthermore, the significance of cultural capital is that it bestows fashion models’ with a tacit understanding of how to act and react to pervading affective intensities during many ceremonies wherein the consumption experience is framed. Their distinguishing forms of capital bestow them with incomparable fluidity with which to circulate affect. The greater a person’s cultural capital, the more ‘natural’ their performance appears (Bourdieu 1984). Naturalness or effortlessness is therefore crucial in eliciting belief in the authenticity of the consumption experience as it invokes intensified emotions of parity and thus, legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985). As observed when discussing ‘framing’, a fluid mobilisation of these intensities is more likely to affect bodies in relation who are then increasingly likely to project an aura of deification onto the cultural intermediary and their world.

For example, the walk is an embodied performance that mobilises affective flow while at the same time, affirms models’ consecration and emancipation to a higher order due to the rare intensities evoked by such. This expert mobilisation animates the narrative of consecration while invoking potent energies of vitality and aliveness in bodies in relation. In doing so, the intensity modulated by cultural intermediaries blurs the line between real and imaginary. As illustrated by my narrative data, the fluid mobilisation of affect possesses the capacity to lull bodies into reverie. Yet similarly, upon disruption to this fluidity42, bodies in relation can experience disenchantment with the consumption experience as they become jolted back to objective reality. As a result, they no longer believe in the consecrated status of the supposed deity.

Interestingly, while bodies in relation (in the case of this study, other intermediaries, tastemakers etc.) may not be able to articulate the impact of the flow of energies, their cultural capital sensitises their bodies, making them susceptible to feeling these in intensities. Upon embodied recognition of, and engagement with these affective energies, bodies in relation mythologise and romanticise its source due to the ecstatic intensity felt upon impact. In this sense, cultural intermediaries using embodied affective intensities for vocabulary weave narratives of consecration and deification. Cultural, combined with the other forms of capital identified ultimately determines models’ capacities’ to take part, and importantly, to scribe these narratives.

I interpret the animation of these narratives as not only dependent on cultural capital however, but also, on emotional capital derived from epiphanic experiences. Kozinets and Handelman

42 Such as falling on the runway
(2004) observe how such experiences contain spiritual significance that elevates individuals’ status beyond the confines of commonality and ordinariness to a transcendent realm of mystique and reverie. Indeed, high fashion depends on perpetuating the illusion of two separate ‘worlds’ through cultural mediation. Thus, while consecration bestows cultural intermediaries with significant cultural, social and symbolic capital by which to distinguish themselves, epiphanies also generate ontological capital within bodies. Having lacered bodies with affective intensities, the emotional response to such an experience remains pinned to their embodied dispositions (Merleau-Ponty 1962) where they constitute their unique habitus (Bourdieu 1984).

From here, intermediaries’ unique cultural and emotional capital facilitates their reflection on past affective states followed by their effortless reinvigoration and animation of these resonances. As identified by Crossley (2001), humans, as emotional beings, are bound through shared commonalities and affective resonances. Intermediaries’ reinvigoration of such affective states creates an emotional tie while also triggering the imagination, during which time bodies in relation experience similar memories and emotions. Intermediaries’ expertise endows them with the rare capacity to tap into these affective resonances and reanimate them with intensified vigour. As illustrated by my experience at the Helmut Lang shoot, the significance of emotional capital is such, that it facilitates fashion models’ capacity to open their bodies to affect and be affected as they feed off the affective energies that pervade the set. As value in an affective economy is made through the ‘enlivening, capacitating and modulating of affect’ (Wissinger 2007a: 334), intermediaries’ expertise grants them the capacity to control these volatile affective energies on set and channel them into the mobilisation of affective intensities, experienced as charisma, lust, passion etc. The modulation of such draws intensified emotions from viewers and a deeply resonating, impactful affective attachment to the ethereal reality of the model life.

6.2.3 Can we identify the impact made by the mobilisation of affect?

During cultural mediation, the expertise with which fashion models frame consumption experiences results in impact; ‘intended to influence others’ estimation of goods and thus lead to attachment’ (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012: 554). Therefore, when we discuss

43 Such experiences can endow intermediaries the capacity to free oneself from inhibitions (Henrik), learning how pure emotion can elicit emotions in others (James, Matt), or the capacity to manipulate the character of clothing from years of being forced to wear certain clothing due to growing up in a large family (Noel).

44 Such as terror, lust, passion etc., all of which have been experienced by adults to a greater or lesser extent.
‘impact’, we are referring to the affective attachment felt toward the consumption experience which has been forged by the cultural intermediary. Impact is significant as an enduring attachment felt toward the experience ensures reproduction of the boundaries around taste and ideology in the field. Based on my empirical findings, I further delineate the concept of impact based on three main constituents. Importantly, these aspects are discussed separately for ease of illustration only. In actuality, they are very much interrelated, as they constitute different stages of the emotional upheaval felt during an affective consumption experience.

The initial point of impact concerns the affective response felt by bodies in relation that channels their attention toward the experience. We understand that the correlation between affect and attention in an affective economy places a premium on the provocation of an affective response in bodies. This type of response escapes capture by cognitive rationale and instead ‘takes place below the level of awareness; consequently, it makes sense that even those who are supposed to know what it is that makes a model command attention (e.g. the people who represent and manage models, such as model agents, or those who hire models, such as magazine editors) often remain unable to exactly explain a model’s success’ (Wissinger 2007a: 237). Yet as noted, impact is experienced through an embodied mode of thinking and acting that is based largely on cultural and emotional capital as well as social, symbolic and embodied.

There are numerous illustrations of attempts to articulate affective response in my data. While none capture the process precisely due to its pervasion beneath consciousness, my respondents spoke of being intimately drawn to and seduced by the magnetic, affective energies mobilised by the cultural intermediary. Embodied dispositions become altered during the moment of affective response as bodies’ perceptions of reality are transmuted to correspond with a more favourable reality experienced in imagination. Thus, in an affective economy, I argue the purpose of cultural intermediaries is to inject bodies with an intensified vitality rather than a tableau of culturally significant meanings. This point is also supported by Schwartz (1976: 69) who noted; ‘I do not care what number of people remember or get the message. I am concerned about how many people are affected by the stimuli’. Upon becoming affectively attached, these embodied energies translate to emotion. At this point, the viewer as a ‘dream artist’ (Campbell 1987), will construct meaning based on her/his cultural/emotional capital and imagination. Yet in terms of explicit impact, I argue the consumption experience must be intense and engaging rather than explicitly meaningful.
Secondly, having captured the attention of bodies in relation, the affective response engendered is best described as ‘enchanted’; ‘whose effects include intoxication, wonder, elevation, ‘amplification’ of the soul and ecstasy’ (Monti 2012: 2). I articulate enchantment as a mesmerised and embodied response to the trigger of affective resonances from within relational bodies. It appeals to the non-rationality of imagination rather than a cognitive sense of logic. The enchantment induced by a positive affective response stimulates bodies’ imitation of the affecting presence as fictions begin to take up residence in reality (Wood 2005: 12). Thus, upon being enchanted, the line between real and imaginary is obliterated as bodies recognise themselves as, or in relation to, the deified cultural intermediary. The consumption experience animated by the cultural intermediary ‘sanctifies the immediate so as to create the momentary illusion of divinity in the individual, or of the eternal in the moment, or of indestructible existence, or of unfading beauty in what has long since passed, of happiness and its availability, or of death’ (Jaeger 2012: 35). That enchantment is experienced as a ‘momentary illusion’ (Jaeger 2012) does not make the consumption experience any less real (Berger 1972). As argued by Thrift (2010), imagination is a lived experience in itself.

Finally, I interpret the concluding stage of impact as resonance. That is, the affective stimuli embodied and mobilised by the cultural intermediary form a unique emotional attachment whereupon they resonate with relational bodies’ existing memories, emotions, experiences, aspirations etc. Resonance is therefore invoked through processes of contamination, as the intensities felt during an affective response endure in the form of an affective attachment to the consumption experience. Upon the mediation of an affective attachment, resonance implies that some of the deepest, unfilled desires and aspirations of viewers’ recognition, belonging, transcendence, immortality, and salvation are experienced through imagination due to the mimetic nature of affect. Vicarious consumption of the illusory promise mediated by cultural intermediaries has a ‘healing, redeeming and cathartic effect’ (Jaeger 2012: 376) on bodies in relation. That is, the affective capacity of the consumption experience has an epiphanic effect as it absorbs affected individuals into this fantasy wherein they are emancipated from despair and the burdens imposed by objective daily life. The affective intensities that become pinned

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It must be reiterated that not all individuals will have a positive affective response. However, this research only deals with the cohort that do feel enchanted.
to these bodies manifest as emotion, whereupon they act as an enduring support for the authenticity of the illusory pleasures felt during imagined consumption of the model life.

6.3 ‘The Model Life’

Extant literature (Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011) conceptualises the model life as a scarce cultural commodity or branded lifestyle within a highly contested field of production; high fashion. As a field of competition for cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985), access to the model life is granted based on capital accumulation (Molly and Larner 2010; Parmentier and Fischer 2007) and thus, the fluid mobilisation of affect that captures the attention of gatekeepers in the field, resulting in consecration. In a field of restricted production, consecration affirms as aspirants as ‘special’ and ‘privileged’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2011) based on gatekeepers’ recognition of their unique expertise.

In high fashion, as my empirical data illustrates, consecration ‘offers individuals an escape from their outsider identity in that quotidian world beyond the pale of fashion. It offers entrée into a world that harbours the elite’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2011: 20). Of the select few that are consecrated, the majority are ignored, deemed ‘not special’ and therefore ‘ordinary’ by virtue of their lack of expertise/affecting presence with which to command recognition. According to Parmentier and Fischer (2011), these individuals must also employ agency. For example, the authors note how this group disengage their identities from high fashion discourses. They do this in two ways. The first of which is by appropriating a completely new identity suffused with different, and potentially contrasting ideologies to that of high fashion. Secondly, individuals engage in ‘dis-authentication’ by recasting their view of the model life as a mere fabrication or illusion.

Yet these modes of agency, while valid, constitute very rational approaches that do not consider the ‘imaginative hedonism’ (Campbell 1987) that characterises this current era of consumption. Although the vast majority of individuals will never experience the model life, intermediaries’ creation of an affective tie bestows viewers with just enough cultural/emotional capital (and subsequent advertising literacy) that their aspirations toward this branded lifestyle can be triggered. Therefore, although those bearing an affective attachment to high fashion do not possess the capacity to mobilise affect and mediate taste, they are literate enough to imaginatively engage with the consumption experience that can be consumed for the price of their attention.
Importantly, as noted, the imaginary structure of this reality does not negate its perceived authenticity (Berger 1972). Thus, as an affect-laden, imaginative commodity, those with the requisite capital feel authentic representations of the model life whereupon these bodies are emancipated from their everyday lives to this higher, transcendent reality. Based on that discussed in the previous section of this chapter, we now understand how the mobilisation of affect frames the consumption experience as transcendent. However, there is also a greater need to articulate the characteristics of this reality.

6.3.1 A Transcendent Experience

My empirical findings extend the aesthetic experience of the model life by noting the interconnectedness that exists between art and sacredness. That is, cultural mediation of affective presentations triggers individuals’ emotions and subsequent emancipation from the mundane to allow transcendence to the model life where they temporarily experience the sacred (Belk et al. 1989). I interpret the purpose of high fashion’s appropriation of artistic principles embodied by the intermediary as a way of preserving this air of sacredness and apparent elevation to a higher order. Furthermore, I have interpreted their anti-capital stance purely as fluid processes of affective labour designed to legitimate the field’s manufactured esoteric and artistic purity as natural.

Given the importance of highlighting this overlooked affective labour, a core contribution of this research has been the extension of the model life beyond a cultural commodity that is literally consumed. By adopting a non-representational stance, we can observe how the mobilisation of affective intensities mediates affect-laden representations of the model life as a spiritual, transcendent experience. In conceptualising high fashion as a domain of sacred consumption (Belk et al. 1989), I characterise cultural intermediaries as evangelists of the model life that mediate an affective connection to an aesthetically pure and spiritual consumption experience via their look.

I have already drawn on authors to illustrate the significance of artistry to the consumption experience (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). For instance, I noted how the avant-garde aesthetic employed by high fashion is an affective force (Thrift 2010) in that it invokes ‘pure’
experiences (Bourdieu 1985) that vade rational capture to trigger the imagination. Furthermore, the capacity to appreciate and consume these experiences is dependent on one’s capital resonances. Exploring cultural mediation through a non-representational lens, I interpret from my data that the impact made by intensified affective energies sacralises the consumption experience, resulting in bodies’ projection of an enduring spiritual aura onto that which they have encountered.

To offer further insight into this claim, particularly with the advance of late capitalist culture, consumption has become a vehicle by which individuals transcend everyday, mundane existence and experience that which they perceive as sacred (Belk et al. 1989). Where once people found solace in religion, they now place their faith in signs, worship myths or repent by abstinence and self-denial of these branded experiences. These ethereal encounters are mediated to consumers by the consecrated (intermediaries) as the key to salvation. The virtues of consecration are extolled through multi-sensory seduction and affective experiences that authenticate the illusion of transcendence to an ethereal reality.

The affective response to subsequent emotional stimuli enchants individuals to ‘create an illusion which is known to be false but felt to be true’ (Campbell 1987: 78). By projecting an aura of reverie onto the animated representation, the affected body suspends disbelief and vicariously revels in the transcendent reality where (s)he communes with the sacred. Indeed, as Harrington (1983) argues, Western Society needs transcendence to fulfil the necessary desire to believe in something more significant, extraordinary and rewarding (Belk et al. 1989). An absence of such otherwise exposes individuals to the harsh dullness and profane realities of everyday life.

Yet with regard the sacred/profane distinctions, it is important to note that the dichotomy between the two is a false one (Arnould and Price 2004)$. There are no clear-cut boundaries between the two. However through affective labour that enacts sacred/profane distinctions, cultural intermediaries circulate intensified affective narratives that at the very ontology the sacred consumption experience with the profane c consumption experience with the sacredness. This is an integral role of cultural intermediaries as the visible contamination of sacredness with profanity can be felt by bodies in relation and serves to falsify the authenticity of the illusory reality. Thus, an important point

$46 That being said, it does not negate the intensity of the sacred qualities (Durkheim 1915; Belk et al. 1989) that permeate this fantasy structure.
is that anything can be made sacred (Acquaviva 1979). Intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect veils profane intensities behind a framed narrative of sacredness (Arnould and Price 2004). In doing so, bodies become enchanted and an intensified belief in the spiritual purity of the consumption experience resonates with their embodied dispositions.

The use of this etic framework is beneficial as it offers context to the effects of affect. That is, how cultural intermediaries mobilisation of affect (an intensified energy that elicits non-rational behaviour from affected bodies) is received by affected bodies relative to the consumption experience (which is framed as transcendent). For instance, the use of language on the parts of my respondents (‘aura’, ‘magic’, ‘destiny’, ‘immortality’) conveys a spiritual theme. Their affective labour enshrouds the aesthetic experience within this veil of sacredness and provokes belief from others in the legitimacy of the ‘magic’. However, a potential limitation in using this framework is its representational focus. By this I refer to the specific reference to the ‘principles’ of sacredness. While this offers an understanding of the features that constitute the aesthetic consumption experience, within each characteristic (As I have provided here) must be an acknowledgement of the processes constitutive of sacredness.

Where the aesthetic consumption experience (whether nostalgic or future orientated) is concerned, this analytical model is an important part of conceptualising the transcendence elicited through the embodied performance of art and sacredness. In other words, I argue that the mediation of a transcendent consumption experience necessitates intermediaries’ (and subsequent imagery, brands, institutions etc.) embodiment of artistic and sacred principles as well as processes if the experience is to be legitimated as divine.

To illustrate this point further, I argue that the connection between art (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014) and sacredness (Durkheim 1915; Belk et al. 1989; Arnould and Price 2004) in high fashion is embodied by the look. From the outset, I interpret the look as that which embodies a rare, avant-garde aesthetic that invokes an aura of sacredness due to its ineffability of its appeal and inherently non-ordinary qualities (Belk et al. 1989; Clark 1986). For example, I deduce from my discussion of Kate Moss that she embodies in intensified affective energies that jolt bodies out of their routinized, mundane stupors. Like a fine art object, she commands the attention of bodies’ with the cultural capital to decipher her coded appeal and provokes their interest.
As a consecrated deity, Moss embodies ‘the need to believe in something significantly more powerful and extraordinary than the self- a need to transcend existence as a mere biological being coping with the everyday world’ (Belk et al. 1989: 2). Both she and my participants embody a look that is not conventionally attractive, yet, possesses a ‘depth’ from which affective energies can be reinvigorated to circulate intensities that directly oppose the profane. Furthermore, before Moss’ initial consecration (‘discovery’), profane intensities that induced emotions of boredom, ordinariness and a lack of enthusiasm were increasingly felt due to the widespread, traditional depictions of beauty that dominated consumption experiences. Cultural intermediaries such as Moss embody the artistic, esoteric, radiant and pure intensities that had been diluted from the consumption experience. In the absence of intensified energies, the experience of fashion is deemed bland, boring, vulgar and basic (i.e. commercial). That is, its inherent lack of ‘depth’ or ‘soul’ renders it profane and therefore, void of cultural legitimacy and aesthetic value. Language such as this is instrumental in allowing the sacred/profane framework to emerge naturally from the data. When deployed, the framework illustrates the affective capacity of the consumption experience and also the deified presence of the cultural intermediary.

6.3.2 Kratophany

To further specify the sacred attributes of the look, I interpret that narrative descriptions of being utterly ‘seduced’ and having one’s ‘bones rattle’ upon engagement with an affecting presence as a manifestation of the sacred quality; kratophany (Belk et al. 1989). Kratophanous power elicits overwhelming emotions toward an affecting presence. One pertinent example of this power is felt at the photo-shoot for Helmut Lang during which spectators (including myself) were enthralled by the charismatic energies of both models. A look that is charged with pure energies can provoke intense devotion from bodies toward the consumption experience. Similarly, the kratophanous capacity of a look can also invoke emotions of fear and revulsion in the viewer (Thompson and Haytko 1997). An example of such is the ‘heroin chic’ look of the 1990s. While it was met with a mixture of contempt and devotion, it provoked strong affective responses from audiences. It was ‘interesting’ in that it captured attention with an aesthetic that existed outside the profane world of commerce and traditional beauty. It was certainly not ‘basic’, ‘standard’, or ‘bland’. The kratophanous intensity of this look disguised its commerciality and instilled its intermediaries and the consumption experience mediated with an intensified sacredness that continues to endure.
6.3.3 Ecstasy and Flow

An affecting presence thus possesses a prophetic quality that upon consecration, endows the bearer with the ‘magical power’ to redefine that which is considered sacred (Belk et al. 1989; Weber 1996). As the sublime encapsulated in a human presence’ (Jaeger 2012: 42), this presence is capable of invoking the sacred quality of ecstasy and flow (Belk et al. 1989) in bodies in relation. This is described by Colpe (1987) as an experience during which the intensities felt can take a person outside of her/himself whereby (s)he is now consumed by fantasy. The experience ‘adds to life an enchantment which is not reducible or logically deducible from anything else’ (James 1961: 55). For example, upon experiencing ecstasy and flow from an affective Polaroid image, one respondent adopted the analogy of falling in love; which arguably, is also a pure, rarefied, incomparable and ecstatic experience.

6.3.4 Hierophany

Also, a crucial element in framing a sacred narrative is that the look be ‘discovered’ rather than manufactured. This connotes a further sacred property known as hierophany; the ‘act of manifestation of the sacred…i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us’ (Eliade 1958: 7, original emphasis). Participants’ experiences continuously conveyed a miraculous narrative around instances during which a cultural gatekeeper recognised the coded, avant-garde nature of the esoteric look. The predestined, natural affective capacity of the look therefore reinforces the assumption that the sacred is not created, rather, it just is. Furthermore, this sacred quality is not obvious to everyone (Eliade 1958). As Belk et al. (1989) notes, a sacred stone will continue to appear as a normal stone amongst a sea of stones except to those who believe it is unique. A consecratory experience during which further (embodied, social, symbolic, emotional and cultural) capital is amassed solidifies intermediaries’ self-belief in their sacred powers. Various ceremonies of consecration serve to reinforce or (re)sacralise this belief and subsequently (re)affirm their legitimacy as predestined evangelists of the model life.

6.3.5 Communitas

By emphasising their place among the consecrated as predestined, intermediaries’ fulfil a further sacred property described as Communitas (Belk et al. 1989). The production of communitas ‘freees participants from their normal social roles and statuses and instead engages them in a transcending camaraderie of status equality’ (Belk et al. 1989: 7). I interpret this quality as manifest in models’ vehement opposition to the culturally popular notion of fame and celebrity. Abhorring the accessible and savage nature of fame, intermediaries within this
study oppose values based on their culturally rare and esoteric look. Rather than achieve fame or celebrity, intermediaries of high fashion achieve cultural legitimacy through consecration (Bourdieu 1985) at the hands of the culturally authoritative in the field. In forging this separation, models elevate themselves beyond the profane world of celebrity or other commercial occupations for which one receives economic capital. In doing so, their consumption and production processes frame narratives of sacredness ‘which transcend those of status-striving, money-grubbing, and self-serving’ employees of the profane world (Turner 1972: 391-392).

6.3.6 Commitment

I also interpret fashion models’ embodiment of a naturally pure disposition as evocative of a shared Commitment (Belk et al. 1989) amongst the field. That is, fashion models’ commitment to a belief in their predestination and determination evokes a ‘focused emotion or emotional attachment’ to the values and beliefs held by high fashion (Mol 1976: 216). The intensity of this connection or narrative invokes a shared solidarity among intermediaries to commit to high fashion’s definitions of sacred and profane (Belk et al. 1989: 7). Their inheritance of kratophanic power (Belk et al. 1989) again reaffirms their predestined belonging to the model life.

6.3.7 Sacrifice

Furthermore, while taboo practices such as taking drugs and sexual promiscuity can endanger a celebrity’s persona, the opposite appears to be true in high fashion. Such is the extent of this contrast, that I interpret models’ taboo consumption practices as forms of sacrifice (Belk et al. 1989). Traditionally, sacrifice referred to establishing a connection with the sacred by ritualistic behaviours such as martyrdom, self-mutilation, fasting or sexual abstinence (Mol 1976). These acts prepare the person to commune with the sacred while also evoking a dedication and belief to sacred values (Belk et al. 1989).

I interpret intermediaries’ ritualistic acts of sacrifice as performed in accordance to the values held sacred by high fashion. However, rather than engage in ‘mortal’ and profane acts like diet and exercise, models’ ritualistic purifying practices (Canniford and Shankar 2013) are performed during their hedonistic consumption of alcohol, drugs and promiscuous sex. These taboo activities are rationalised as a ‘freedom’ afforded to intermediaries by virtue of being consecrated as deities with the capacity to weave dreams for bodies in relation. However,
importantly, the consecration bestowed upon intermediaries and the consumption experience
does not remain indefinitely, but rather, is subject to time and events that may profane it47
(Dion and Arnould 2011). The natural, embodied performances or ‘magic’ used to frame the
consumption experience are ultimately ‘laborious processes designed to invest the profane with
some sacred aura’ (Arnould and Price 2004: 52). For instance, various sacralisation rituals are
employed by high fashion intermediaries to ‘prevent their entrance into the profane world
where they might be consumed or used’ (Belk et al. 1989: 21). That is, the profane is veiled
through the strategic consumption and production processes of cultural intermediaries. In high
fashion, the most important sacralisation rituals that animate and preserve this sacred narrative
are the image and fashion show. As ceremonies of consecration, shows and shoots embody
several sacred properties already discussed such as hierophany, kratophany, opposition to the
profane, commitment and communitas (Belk et al. 1989).

6.3.8 Objectification
I also interpret these ceremonies as fulfilling the sacred property of Objectification (Belk et al.
1989). Mol (1976: 206) describes this quality as ‘the tendency to sum up the variegated
elements of mundane existence in a transcendent frame of reference where they can appear
in a more orderly, more consistent, and more timeless way’. Thus, objectification is achieved
through high fashion’s appropriation of artistic principles that invoke a climate of reverence
and ethereality around the consumption experience (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008; Venkatesh
et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). A prime manifestation of this sacred
quality is felt during consumption of affective imagery, luxury stores (Dion and Arnould 2011;
Joy et al. 2014) and also, as illustrated by my data, at the fashion show.

6.3.9 Ritual
Upon being framed within the transcendental world of fine art, I further interpret these high
fashion ceremonies as spaces for the performance of sacralisation ritual (Belk et al. 1989).
These are designed to enchant bodies’ experiences and shape their dispositions. Durkheim
(1915: 56) has described rituals as ‘rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport
himself in the presence of…sacred objects’. These rituals tend to escape the rationale that

47 An example of such is the charismatic Dior creative director John Galliano. In 2011, while in a Paris bar, the
designer was recorded making anti-Semitic remarks. This lead to his dismissal and the erosion of his cultural
legitimacy for a brief time. However, in 2013, with the help of brand Oscar de La Renta, he launched a new
collection, although many question if his once deified persona can ever fully recover.

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guides them and are performed without deliberate thought (Belk et al. 1989: 7). For example, the affective intensities mobilised by the walk elicit kratophanic energies that cause bodies to project a d eified aura upon cultural intermediaries and also, the consumption experience through contagion. These arbiters of taste become elevated above ‘mere mortals’ who remain mesmerised by her/his effortless fluidity and grace.

6.3.10 Myth and Mystery

The sacred aura projected by the enchanted body is an imagined narrative that appears as authentic. Intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect animates this narrative and in doing so, authenticates the sacred properties of myth and mystery (Belk et al. 1989). Myths are usually generated around sacred objects through narrative to denote its elevated status (Kirk 1970). Intermediaries’ consecration of the consumption experience with these spiritually pure intensities serves to perpetuate the sacred myth that adheres to bodies’ imaginations and constitutes their emotional capital. Similarly, Nisbet (1966) observes how the sacred quality of mystery derives from a desire for more profound experiences. When something is diluted of its mystery, it loses its sacred aura and is consequently experienced as profane (Belk et al. 1989).

6.3.11 Contamination

The purpose of the exaggerated theatricality of the fashion show is to circulate affect with which to contaminate (Belk et al. 1989) the consumption experience with emotion that would not be felt outside of this framed narrative. Through contamination, cultural intermediaries frame affect-laden stories of consecration and deification as legitimate and desirable. It is therefore vital for these narratives, if they are to retain their sacred mystery, that they contaminate profane objects with affect through contagion. For example, the fashion shows illustrated within this research animate stories of feeling and emotion that elevate bodies, making them imaginatively inhabit the dream-world of the artist’s inspired ‘vision’. While my respondents possessed sufficient cultural capital to thematically articulate the context of the show, any greater, logical analysis of the ‘magic’ occurring would render the consumption experience profane (Arnould and Price 1993).

6.3.12 Quintessence

Having become contaminated with sacredness, the consumption experience is bestowed with quintessence (Belk et al. 1989). Experiences are made quintessential when they are endowed with the ‘rare and mysterious capacity to be just exactly what they ought to be…unequivocally
right’ (Cornfield and Edwards 1983, in Belk et al. 1989: 16). For example, upon contamination by the ethereal capacities of cultural intermediaries over a number of decades, Dior has become a quintessential brand that is beyond mere commerce by virtue of the intense attributes of sacredness that permeate the brand’s narrative which encapsulates the aesthetically pure spirit of high fashion. That is, through continuous rituals of consecration such as fashion shows, editorial imagery et c. the brand has repeatedly contaminated with affect, thereby bestowing it with emotional qualities and deeper ingrained within high fashion ideology by virtue of intermediaries’ actions and interactions.

This research has illustrated how ‘art’, a grandiose, little word is a term used to make sense of those experiences that evade rational cognition and thus, articulate that which can only be felt. Art is emancipatory by nature in that its affective energies offer transcendence to those with the requisite cultural capital to consume it. Given its affective capacity, art as a concept has been appropriated by high fashion to elevate its values and beliefs to a higher order. The result of which enshrouds the field with a cultural rarity that evokes an ineffable, ‘magical’ appeal. A non-representational approach to studying this aspect of high fashion helps to further conceptualise the significance of these artistic principles as affect-laden. That is, cultural intermediaries’ enactment and subsequent contamination of artistic ideologies with affect animates art as an illusory being (Jaeger 2012) and legitimates the notion of high fashion as a spiritual and transcendent consumption experience.

Connecting the artistic principles of high fashion to the qualities of sacred consumption, this contribution illustrates how the affecting intensities embodied in the look embroider a sacred veil that disguises the profane qualities of the model life. Bodies in relation become spellbound by the affecting, kratophanic powers of the cultural intermediary, who upon consecration is transubstantiated to a deified work of art. Their innate, hierophanic capacity to create an affective connection with bodies invokes a felt purity and intimacy beyond articulation. Through contamination, the consumption experience is ‘spiritually consecrated’ (Bourdieu 1993) whereupon the felt impact of models’ intensities constitute bodies’ capital resonances. The experience thus becomes ingrained as a quintessential aspect of high fashion doctrine as viewers are enraptured by and subsequently believe in the authentic, culturally legitimate and spiritually pure consumption experience perceived through imagination.
In Chapter Two, I framed my initial discussion of cultural intermediaries in CCT based on McCracken (1986). While noting how cultural intermediaries are integral to the transfer of meaning, McCracken (1986) does not explicitly articulate the embodied consumption and production processes that constitute cultural mediation. As such, there remain some unanswered questions in this regard. For example, meaning transfer is dependent on the existence of ‘special harmony’ (McCracken 1986:75) that arises from consumers’ recognition of existing meaning from the culturally constituted world. While this is taken for granted, I interpret recognition and subsequent harmony as only possible upon a pre-existing affective tie being forged by cultural intermediaries (the embodiments of cultural and aesthetic value) with the viewer.

Therefore, within this section, I present a potential contribution to consumer research in the form of an empirically supported, reconsideration of what cultural intermediaries actually do when they ‘transfer meaning’. That is, I foreground cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect as a precursor to meaning transfer and the core influence of the process by which the consumption experience is framed as transcendent and authentic. An articulation of such holds important implications for how we conceptualise cultural intermediaries’ impact and the significance of cultural meaning to the consumption experience.

To begin, having adopted a non-representational approach to research, I frame my discussion of cultural mediation within the context of an affective economy. As mentioned in Chapter Two, an affective economy is one wherein value is aesthetic and derived from the mobilisation of affective intensities that command recognition of bodies’ while forging an enduring affective tie. The concept of the affective economy also adheres to Holt’s (2002) theory of brand management which argues that brands no longer seek to communicate specific meanings to audiences.

Rather, they gain aesthetic value by vesting in cultural life and establishing certain coordinates within which they manage consumer activity (Holt 2002). Specifically, brands attempt to harness the productive capacity of cultural intermediaries in order to attach to the affective connections made with consumers within a social space; ‘the moment of value for the brand is not necessarily in the production of a particular meaning, but prior to that, in stabilising and managing the generalised circulation of affect’ (Carah 2014: 364). Similar to Holt (2002), Carah (2014) continues to note that the objective of brands is no longer to convey specific
meaning intended for appropriation by consumers. Instead, the meanings bestowed upon brands are quite ‘generalised’ (Carah 2014: 349) and as I argue, stem from the non-rational, ineffable affective connection an imitated by cultural intermediaries during mediation of an intense consumption experience.

Cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affective flow is therefore critical to achieving the ultimate source of value sought by brands in this economy. Since McCracken (1986), there has been a shift in prioritisation of value to appreciate those stimuli that trigger bodies affective resonances and consequently, shape behaviour and tastes (e.g. Belk et al. 1989; Arnould and Price 1993; Elliott 1997; 1998; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002; Joy and Sherry 2003; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). The consumption experience is therefore not only meaningful, but is also suffused with pre-cursive, affective intensities (Arnould and Price 1993; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Dion and Arnould 2011). Having experienced an affective rather than rational response, viewers are enchanted to imaginatively inhabit a higher, more authentic reality that is ‘known to be false but felt to be true’ (Campbell 1987: 78). This point is supported by work on vicarious nostalgia (Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002) during which the intensity felt toward affective imagery facilitates consumers’ escape to a more pleasurable affective state.

To further articulate the affective economy in which this takes place, Ahmed (2004) has discussed affective economies based on fear, love, disgust etc. As such, I specify my discussion of cultural mediation as one framed within an affective economy of desire. Existing discussions of desire adhere with the conceptualisation of affect forwarded by this research. For example, desire is ‘overpowering; something we give in to; something that takes control of us and totally dominates our thoughts, feelings and actions. Desire awakens, seizes, teases, titillates, and arouses’ (Belk et al. 2000: 99). Furthermore, Belk et al. (1996, 1997) argue that improper acknowledgement of desire in consumer research has led to the neglect of the various nonverbal, corporeal and emotional intensities felt during consumption. Combined with these qualities, as illustrated throughout this thesis, desire is also inherently non-rational. The intensity with which it is felt upon provocation is capable of spawning ‘revolutions, wars and crimes’ (Belk et al. 1996: 369). Cultural intermediaries’ affective impact is therefore capable of overriding viewers’ sense of logic and ‘hailing’ (Goldman and Papson 1996) them to believe in the fictitious promise of transcendence animated by high fashion intermediaries.
To this end, desire is triggered by invoking a felt sense of discontent that permeates consumers’ affective resonances (Elliott 1997; Goulding 2002; Belk et al. 2003). As noted, I believe this dissatisfaction is induced by the introduction of late capitalist culture and individuals’ subsequent disenchantment with religion. Branded, aesthetic consumption experiences now fulfil the human need to believe in something more powerful, extraordinary and transcendent than oneself (Belk et al. 1989). In the wake of the transcendent experiences provided by prayer and pilgrimage, consumerists have sought to ameliorate this void in affect-laden ‘cathedrals of consumption’ (Belk et al. 1989). Such is my rationale for conceptualising cultural intermediaries as evangelists of the model life. As illustrated in Chapters Four and Five, their affecting presence elicits intensified feelings of imitation and devotion in consumers attempting to fill this void; ‘consumer imaginations of and cravings for consumer goods not yet possessed can mesmerize and seem to promise magical meaning in life’ (Belk et al. 2003: 327).

Given the mimetic, contagious nature of affect, this research adheres to the argument forwarded by Crossley (2001) and conceptualises desire as a desire for recognition. That is, ‘desire does not desire satisfaction. To the contrary, desire desires desire. The reason images are so desirable is that they never satisfy’ (Taylor and Saarinen 1994, in Elliott 1997: 288). Upon being consecrated, cultural intermediaries are immortalised in the consumption experience and animate authentic representations of their legitimised belonging to this transcendent reality. The affective narrative of consecration and deification mediated from this elevated vantage point forges an emotional attachment with bodies, thereby stoking their envy. Berger (1972) observes how the state of being envied is essential to provoking viewers’ projection of aura onto the consumption experience. Thus, desire ultimately feeds on the provocation of envy and aspiration as both are at odds with rationality and logic. Furthermore, Berger (1972: 148) argues that aura;

‘cannot exist without personal social envy being a common and widespread emotion. The industrial society which has moved towards democracy and then stopped halfway is the ideal society for generating such an emotion. The pursuit of individual happiness has been acknowledged as a universal right. Yet the existing social conditions make the individual feel powerless.’
I interpret the feeling of powerlessness to which Berger refers as resultant from the continuous barrage of alluring, affective imagery that pierces individuals’ porous boundaries. He continues;

‘He lives in the contradiction between what he is and what he would like to be. Either he then becomes fully conscious of the contradiction and its causes, and so joins the political struggle for a full democracy which entails, amongst other things the overthrow of capitalism; or else he lives, continually subject to an envy which, compounded with his sense of powerlessness, dissolves into recurrent day-dreams’.

Thus, in triggering bodies’ desires for recognition, the affective tie forged allows them to imaginatively recognise themselves in the likeness of that which provoked such intensified envy. Arguably, for the majority of consumers, imaginative hedonism (Campbell 1987) is a more feasible and emotionally pleasurable choice than joining the political struggle to overthrow capitalism. For in dismantling capitalism, we would also eradicate consumer culture as we know it and abolish the sacred and imaginative experiences to which we are devoted, and within which we have placed such deep faith.

A further, and fundamental aspect of desire in an affective economy is that it must remain perpetually unfilled; ‘Since reality cannot live up to the perfect worlds of daydreaming, inspired by advertising as well as general mythologies of ‘the good life’, the dynamism of the market does not depend on fulfilling desires but rather on their perpetual recreation’ (Belk et al. 1996: 370). This insatiable nature results in desire becoming a gratifying end in itself (Campbell 1987; Elliott 1997; Belk et al. 2003) as consumers existentially consume using imagination to conjure fantasy. Potential actualisation of this reality would inevitably yield great dissatisfaction and disenchantment as the authenticity of one’s affective attachment to the model life will always be at its most ‘pure’ in imagination (Campbell 1987). However, disillusionment does not sever the affective tie felt to the consumption experience but rather, as Campbell (1987) notes, merely represents a stepping-stone on the perpetual crossing toward illusory self-fulfilment. The disillusionment that inevitably ensues is integral to the enchanting, aspirational nature of high fashion and the model life as disenchantment facilitates yet another seasonal bombardment of ‘new’ narratives, trends and branded promises of salvation and transcendence.
Such is the critical need for cultural intermediaries to possess chameleonic personas with the capacity to transform into various fashionable dreams and sacred narratives through the animation of ‘characters’ with different emotions and dispositions. As noted in Chapter Five, this makes the consumption experience appear as new and captivating, which serves to inculcate competent consumers in the reproduction of the field’s exclusivity and cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985). Thus, based on my empirical data, I articulate consumption in an affective economy as driven by dreams of perfect moments (Campbell 1987). Unfulfilled desires and aspirations are housed within a consumer culture where ‘emotions are stimulated, incited, made into obsession through the use of imagination, the production of ‘longing’ and imaginative dissatisfaction, along the model life day-dream’ (Slater 1997: 96). Therefore, rather than the transfer of meaning, I posit that the affective capacity to animate these transcendent experiences and mediate them to consumers through an affective tie is the core point of value creation in this late capitalist economy.

An appreciation of ‘affect’ as a concept is therefore critical in understanding late capitalist consumption as these energies impact and engage viewers’ imaginations. Having created an affective tie with this non-rational construct, individuals are free to vicariously inhabit countless identities, scenarios and distinct worlds (Benjamin 1936). However, an adequate exploration of the cultural mediation of these experiences necessitates not just a consumer or producer led perspective, but rather, one that amalgamates narratives of both in relation to the branded consumption experience. Such is my reasoning for prefacing this discussion as a ‘potential contribution’.

However, my research does allow for an expansion to knowledge from the perspective of the producer, or cultural intermediary. To this end, combining my empirical research with extant literature on affect, desire and consumption (Campbell 1987; Elliott 1997; 1998; Belk et al. 2003), I argue that cultural intermediaries’ impact on consumption is not caused by meaning transfer per se but rather by their contamination of the consumption experience (images, goods, brands etc.) with affect. That is, cultural intermediaries’ production of an intensified affective charge transubstantiates (Bourdieu 1985) the consumption experience from one of profane ordinariness to a spiritually deified (multisensory, pure, authentic, and culturally legitimate) experience that resonates with consumers’ emotional capital. Upon the creation of an affective tie and consequent ‘recognition’ as described by McCracken (1986), the underlying beliefs and
values that constitute the consumption experience become sacralised (Belk et al. 1989; Belk and Costa 1998).

In addition to Dion and Arnould (2011), Newman et al. (2011) provide further clarity on the concept of contamination. Although they use the term ‘contagion’, the authors focus on individuals’ valuation of objects that were once owned by celebrities. They note that the ‘magical process’ (Newman et al. 2011) has a profound effect on consumers’ valuation of objects as they believe the identity or soul of the dead celebrity has become infused within the inanimate object. The authors also observe that consumption of celebrity through the object invokes in the individual, pleasurable emotional states from the past, presumably from their (vicarious) consumption of the celebrity when (s)he was alive. This theory has much in common with cultural mediation as death ultimately connotes distance, otherness and existence in an alternate reality.

Cultural intermediaries are therefore not explicitly symbolic containers of meaning (Soley-Beltran 2004), but rather, are conduits for the flow of affective energies. This point is exemplified during my experience of the Helmut Lang. This shoot illustrates consumption of a ‘pure’, intimate relation between two people. During which, both models’ bodies were open to affect and being affected (Massumi 2002). Their chemistry was not based on meaning but rather was guided by, and fed off the affective energies produced by the various amplifiers (including each other). Their expertise had riveted viewers’ attention and conception of reality to an imaginary scene. I distinctly remember the rapturous intensity of envy, awe and devotion that washed over me during the experience. Interestingly, upon viewing the final shots some weeks later, the same intense pang I had felt returned, and was no less diluted.

Thus, in an affective economy, fashion models do not create and produce a meaningful representation. Rather, as in the case of Helmut Lang, they animate a ‘pure’ representation of an intense, passionate moment of intimacy shared by two people due to their mobilisation of affect being captured in the momentary shot. Those within whom the experience provokes a response are seduced into imaginatively participating in the narrative. That which distinguishes the meaningful image from the affective image is the notion of intensity.

As acknowledged, intensity is measurable by impact (Wissinger 2007a). If the affective stimuli capture attention and invoke an affective response, a connection is made. Only then will the consumption experience resonate with bodies’ emotional capital. To this extent, the
consumption experience of high fashion is similar to the experience of nostalgia. That is, due to the affective capacity of cultural intermediaries, individuals consume the experience existentially, in that we are absorbed into a netherworld beyond objectivity, mundanity, ordinariness and rationality. Its purity envelops our attention and enchants us to submit. It grips us tightly and pulls us under to the depths of illusory hedonism, where, we are willingly drowned.

From a non-representational perspective, I argue that this theorising can be applied to the transcendent/vicarious consumption in general rather than applicable to nostalgic or aspirational experiences. Conceptualising ‘the model life’ as the archetype of that transcendent reality into which individuals are absorbed, research must consider the past, present and future as irrevocably connected and influential (deMan 1970). That is, the processes underlying the consumption experience are the same (the mobilisation of affective stimuli that pierces individuals’ porous boundaries and triggers/connects with their deeper aspirations/experiences), all that has been altered is the context (i.e. past or future). Similarly, the affective difference between the Helmut Lang shoot I witnessed and a film for example is the enduring dispositions of the viewer toward this experience, the various stimuli involved (including the heir of instruments of embodiment) and also the affective arena in which this experience/event takes place. Yet, from a the point of view of the cultural intermediary, he/she must be open to the pervading energies that help to re-invigorate traces of felt intensity that remain alive on his/her body in order to animate and legitimate a certain persona, scenario and overall reality.

Thus, based on the examples above, I argue that the inevitable symbolic meaning conferred upon the consumption experience is a cognitive representation of the intense emotional impact experienced during affective response/enchantment. In other words, affect shapes and constitutes meaning (O’Sullivan 2001; Jhally 1989). As an emotional response always precedes rational judgement, I posit symbolic meaning as vital in that it provides necessary justification for a non-rational belief in a promise that will remain perpetually unfulfilled. In other words, these symbolic meanings that materialises with a return to cognitive awareness restores the deified aura projected during enchantment and maintains bodies’ affective

48 We consume them somewhat nostalgically from the perspective of ‘I wish I’d been there’
49 Referring to the myth of the mermaid used by one particular respondent
50 For example, before it connotes meaning, we might say that a perfume scent triggers an affective response (Elliot 1998; Goulding 2002)
attachment to the experience. Based on this argument, I further articulate desire in an affective economy as triggered during the moment between viewers’ recognition of themselves as/in relation to the ideal subject and the disenchantment felt upon the ‘unwelcome intrusion of reality’ (Campbell 1987: 79). Yet until now, the processes by which affect constitutes meaning and the consumption experience resonates with consumers has been left unspecified.

Based on my findings, a sole representational approach cannot provide sufficient understanding of the aesthetic consumption experience. Rather, it produces overly simplistic evaluations regarding the labour of cultural intermediaries and indeed, the process by which meaning is created. Cultural intermediaries’ contamination of the consumption experience invokes an affective response that inevitably translates to meaning. That is, the experience is meaningful as we can only grasp affect as a representation. However in actuality, meaning is created and projected by the viewer upon first being impacted by the mobilisation of intensified affective energies. This point is supported by Thompson and Haytko (1997: 38) who suggest that ‘the meaning transfer process is a diffuse, transformative and consumer-centred undertaking’. As also noted by Holt (2002), symbolic meanings are not concretised in the object. Rather, the fashionable discourses mediated by cultural intermediaries are a ‘contestable terrain’ upon which consumers rework the meanings to construct an identity according to their own values and beliefs (Thompson and Haytko 1997: 38).

Importantly then, meaning is duty of the consumer. As affect shapes meaning, intermediaries’ pre-cursive mobilisation of affect impacts consumers’ dispositions which therefore, inevitably influences the meaning consumers will interpret from and bestow upon the consumption experience. An appreciation of affect via a non-representational approach can dramatically enhance our understanding of the aesthetic consumption experience and its cultural mediation. Importantly, this endeavour will become solidified as a core contribution through elicitation of consumer narratives surrounding their experiences with/relationship to brands to produce a more rounded illumination of the aesthetic consumption experience.

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been clearly elucidate two core contributions and one potential contribution to consumer research studies. The significance of these contributions corresponds to the shift in our appreciation of the consumption experience to a non-rational, existential, and emotionally intense process. This era of ‘imaginative hedonism’ (Campbell 1987) has placed a premium on the stimulation of imagination through the mobilisation of
affective triggers rather than transfer of meaning. While imaginative consumption has received some treatment (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Arnould and Price 1993; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002; Joy and Sherry 2003), further articulation is required from the elevated perspective of cultural intermediaries.

The primary contribution made by this research has been an articulation of how cultural intermediaries mobilise affective intensities in the creation of an emotional tie that shapes the dispositions and aesthetic sensibilities of bodies in relation. By delineating the process by which this is achieved, we gain an understanding of how the mobilisation of affect frames the consumption experience as culturally legitimate (Bourdieu 1985). The capacity to mediate such authentic presentations necessitates expertise on the part of the intermediary. Expertise constitutes (mainly) rarefied cultural and emotional capital that allows intermediaries to reflect on past affective experiences and reinvigorate these energies during their modulation of affect. Their fluid performance impacts bodies in relation. That is, affective flow provokes an affective response that enchants bodies to project an aura of deification onto the consumption experience.

In this regard, a further contribution of this research has been to extend current conceptualisations of the model life as it is mediated in an affective economy. I observe how the impact made by the mobilisation of affect transmutes the consumption experience of the model life to a spiritual encounter. The restricted field of high fashion is therefore best conceptualised as a domain of sacred consumption. In this sense, cultural intermediaries are evangelists of the model life as their look embodies artistic ideologies combined with several properties of sacredness as outlined by Durkheim (1915) and Belk et al. (1989).

Finally, I present a potential contribution that critiques the meaning transfer model (McCracken 1986) using a non-representational approach. The argument presented insists that rather than the transfer of meaning, cultural intermediaries transmute the consumption experience through contamination with affect. This approach reconceptualises how we might understand meaning transfer. That is, a non-representational approach considers the consumer as an architect of meaning and the cultural intermediary as the affective body that influences consumer perceptions and the subsequent meaning they bestow upon their consumption experience. As noted, this contribution must be strengthened through an approach that encompasses a narrative inquiry of the relation that exists between the producer, consumer and brand.
7. Conclusion

‘My poor unhappy wife, do you recognise your Ceyx, or has death changed my appearance? Look up, and you will know me: you will find your husband’s ghost in place of his true self. As he spoke, Morpheus seemed to Alcyone to be weeping real tears: moreover, she could easily believe that the voice was that of her husband, and he had Ceyx’s gestures too.

She moaned and began to cry in her sleep, raising her arms and trying to touch his body—but she embraced empty air. ‘Wait!’ she cried. ‘Wither away so fast? We shall go together!’

Ovid XI: 456.

7.1 Introduction

This research has led an in-depth exploration of what cultural intermediaries do when they frame aesthetic consumption experiences in relation. I adopted a non-representational approach which foregrounds the imaginative and affective aspects of the consumption experience. The study of cultural mediation through an affective lens places great importance on the intangible intensities that subtly influence individuals’ behaviour when affected. The application of ‘affect’ therefore holds huge potential in terms of expanding on existing concepts of cultural mediation (McCracken 1986; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; Nixon and Du Gay 2010; Smith-Matthews 2012; Smith-Matthews and Maguire 2012) and to better understanding the cultural impact made by these arbiters of taste on consumption.

For instance, it has long been recognised that the contemporary consumption experience is one characterised by ‘imaginative hedonism’ (Campbell 1987) as individuals consume a hedonic fantasy through imagination (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Joy and Sherry 2003). The animation of fictive narratives depict ‘ordinary life’ as a burden that shackles individuals into a mundane, rudimentary pattern of behaviour, void of the intensified feelings of happiness and aliveness felt in the imagination. These affect-laden narratives trigger individuals’ affective resonances and tantalise them to fulfil their aspirations by stimulating
7.2 A Brief Summary

7.2.1 Preface

I chose to include a preface to my introductory chapter within which I delineate several experiences from my youth that have shaped my dispositions and thus, formulated the lens through which I approach this research study. While I spoke of experiences with my fashionable father that have shaped my disposition toward high fashion, perhaps the most pertinent illustration as it pertains to the subtle, yet, intensified impact of cultural mediation lies in my documented experiences of Paris in 2002. The nature of this conversion experience has allowed me to appreciate the intense range of emotions engendered by an affective connection felt to aesthetic experiences of high fashion. Furthermore, I also use this chapter to depict the Ancient Greek narrative of Morpheus, as a way of contextualising the story to be told by my research. Ultimately, Morpheus is a religious story of how deities invade ordinary peoples’ lives and stimulate their deepest desires. A religious sentiment also emerges from my narrative data, in particular, the themes of consecration and deification. The story of Morpheus is therefore useful to frame a story of how the affective capacity of cultural intermediaries captivates bodies’ imaginations and provokes their worship.

7.2.2 Chapter One

This chapter presented the main research aims and questions of this study. As noted, the main question addressed concerns exploring how cultural intermediaries mobilise affect during their mediation of an intense emotional tie between bodies in relation to the consumption experience anchors the ideas and beliefs constitutive of the model life to individuals’ affective resonances, wherefrom enchanted bodies recognise themselves as, or in relation to the ideal subject of the narrative.

Enchanted, individuals make an affective investment in the ‘distinct world’ (Wagner 1999) that has been authenticated through cultural intermediaries’ creation of an affective tie. This research has argued that the embodied consumption and production processes that forge this connection and mediate the promise of transcendence to a transcendent reality deserve greater attention. Having provided this attention in previous chapters, I will briefly summarise the content discussed in each chapter before articulating the incremental theory development made by this research as outlined in Chapter Six.
experience. This aim generated three constitutive sub-questions which firstly considered how cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect frames the consumption experience. Furthermore, the rare expertise required to modulate affect deserves greater illustration as this distinguishes arbiters of taste from ordinary individuals. Finally, I sought to identify the impact made by intermediaries’ modulation of affect upon bodies in relation. To further expand upon these aims, I adopted a non-representational approach that sought to capture the intricacies of cultural mediation that would otherwise remain ignored by a sole representational mode of theorising.

To aid the empirical exploration of my research aims, I chose to adopt the cultural milieu of high fashion. This has proved a very fruitful context for CCT research in the past from a variety of perspectives that I have also delineated (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Wagner, in Holbrook 1999; Murray 2002; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011; 2013; Atik and Firat 2013; Megehee and Spake 2012; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014). High fashion typifies the contemporary era of ‘imaginative hedonism’ (Campbell 1987) given its propensity to ‘inspire dreams’ (Atik and Firat 2013) through the trigger of affective resonances (Elliott 1998). As such, it represents an ideal context within which to explore how cultural intermediaries mobilise affect.

7.2.3 Chapter Two

Chapter Two expands further on the ideas presented in the initial chapter by conceptualising value in late capitalist consumer culture as aesthetic. That is, aesthetic experiences evade cognitive awareness as individuals are absorbed into the transcendent reality detached from notions of practicality and rationality (Wagner 1999). Instead, cultural mediation fosters within them, a more imaginative, dreamlike state (Elliott 1998). Upon the establishment of an affective tie, the ideals, values and beliefs embodied by the consumption experience are romanticised by viewers (Belk and Costa 1998). The premium placed on the generation of value from his affective connection resulted in the adoption of the ‘affective economy’ (Ahmed 2004; Elliott 1998). That is, the production of aesthetic value in the consumer culture is largely dependent on the mobilisation of affect. As such, the capacity of cultural intermediaries to invoke an emotional response and provoke affective investment from bodies is mined for value. Yet until now, the mediation process by which an affective tie is forged has been left unspecified.
I chose fashion models as specific cultural intermediaries whose rare affective capacity facilitates their becoming ‘the personification of the consumer’s dream’ (Venkatesh and Meamber 2010: 466). Categorising high fashion as a field of restricted production (Bourdieu 1985), I further conceptualise this ‘dream’ as ‘the model life’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007); an aesthetic experience animated by arbiters of taste and mediated to individuals for the price of their attention. To add stability to the evasive concept of affect, I adopted the mediation framework outlined by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012) to better illustrate how cultural intermediaries frame consumption experiences through a rare, expert ability to mobilise affect. The effortless flow of energies impact individuals’ perceptions of reality and hence, influences their behaviour.

Given the contributions made by extant literature, I expanded the concept based on the theoretical underpinnings of Bourdieu (1984; 1985; 1990; 1993), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and also fashion literature (Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2002; 2009; Mears and Finlay 2005; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; 2012; Soley-Beltran 2006; Mears 2008; 2009; Entwistle 2009; Wissinger 2007a; 2007b; 2009; Parmentier and Fischer 2007; 2011; Rafferty 2011; Entwistle and Mears 2012; Jones 2013). In order to establish incremental theory development, this framework necessitates empirical support that I sought to achieve through a complementary methodological approach.

7.2.4 Chapter Three

Within this chapter, I outlined the methodology chosen to grasp a better understanding of the processes that create an affective tie to the consumption experience. The innate capacity of cultural intermediaries to reflect on their cultural capital facilitates their mobilisation of affect, which in turn creates a connection between bodies in relation and the aesthetic experience. It was therefore important to choose a methodology that could capture intermediaries’ past experiences as well as to trace the laborious processes that mobilise affect to provoke intense emotional investment.

Combined with my own personal introspection (Hill et al. 2014), I chose to adopt a narrative approach. Narrative is a lens through which individuals negotiate their subjective reality (Shankar et al. 2001). Crucially, as affect is immanent to experience, it can only be captured as a representation of these experiences (O’Sullivan 2001). Intermediaries’ narratives provided an ideal way by which to achieve deep insight into their lived experiences as they strive to
maintain the cultural legitimacy that augments their affective capacity. Specifically, my methodological approach involved narrative interviews with nineteen fashion models, four bookers, five designers/creative directors, three stylists, three photographers as well as brief, casual conversations with various agents and consumers within the field.

To analyse this data, I chose to oscillate between a holistic-content and a categorical-content approach. I adopted the former in order to treat each text as a whole from which to draw interpretations as to the themes conveyed by it. I supplemented this with a categorical-content approach in order to extract specific elements of the narratives that are shared by the group of the participants. Using both of these methods of analysis allowed for the themes and meanings of each participant’s story to emerge, while still in corporating their relevance to the overarching theme of the research story. Having analysed my data, I sought to tell a religious story of consecration and deification titled; ‘Emerging Narratives from Inside the Model Life’, referring to the embodied consumption and production processes of cultural intermediaries that mobilise affect and influence the emotional attachment felt toward the aesthetic consumption experience.

7.2.5 Chapter Four

This chapter marks the beginning of this religious text as fashion models’ narrated stories of their predestined consecration at the hands of gatekeepers of high fashion. Interestingly, while inflected by a religious sensibility, this ethos is also significantly constitutive of capitalist ideologies. That is, consumption as a means by which we can escape and transcend. The ephemeral standard against which the consecrated differentiate their affective capacity is the look. I have described the look as an affecting presence (Armstrong 1971) that possesses a rare capacity to capture the attention and imagination of those who experience its intense affective energies. The look also refers to the model’s capacity to act as a conduit for affective flow in order to invoke a sense of vitality and a liveness in others. This is the reason that many tastemakers could not articulate what it is they find captivating about an abstract, esoteric look (Bourdieu 1985). It must be felt or experienced and as such, is not reducible to any cognitive evaluation. When this presence is felt, the affective response extends beyond a meaningful experience. Rather, my participants described it as an out of body experience during which their dispositions were altered and they became mesmerised by the unique intensity embodied by the fashion model.
There was also an insistence among my participants that the capacity to mobilise these ineffable, affective intensities is innate. The ‘misrecognition’ (Bourdieu 1998) of their labour established fashion models as distinct, and descended from a sacred lineage of the culturally consecrated. That is, their affective capacity cannot be imitated but merely revered. Furthermore, to command affective capacity, cultural intermediaries cannot be pinned to one particular look. Rather, they must possess a unique, chameleonic persona that can rhythmically shift and change in order to capture attention, provoke an affective response and remain ‘interesting’ in correspondence with high fashion zeitgeist. I interpreted this capacity as crucial to the animation of new characters, narratives, emotions etc. and the legitimation of what were perceived as ‘new’ consumption experiences. Thus, the ritual of consecration as outlined in Chapter Four affirms intermediaries’ chameleonic and affective capacity as unique and therefore, ‘special’ or ‘magical’. In doing so, consecration reserves the cultural rarity, ethereality and authenticity of the non-rational aesthetic experience mediated by these arbiters of taste.

7.2.6 Chapter Five

In Chapter Five I explored how intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect invokes an affective response within bodies in relation, causing them to project an aura of deification onto both the consumption experience and the intermediary responsible for its authentication. Focusing on the affective image and theatrical fashion show as contexts for greater insight, I illustrated how intermediaries reflect on their unique stocks of capital to mobilise their affective capacity. In other words, the unique capacity to mobilise affect is developed from intensified epiphanic experiences (such as childhood trauma, witnessing an upset loved one, disobeying cultural norms at the beach etc.) and mobilised by intermediaries’ reflection on these significant events. Cultural intermediaries’ reinvigoration and subsequent modulation of these felt dispositions trigger bodies’ affective resonances and forge a connection through contamination.

For instance, I identified the affecting presence of fashion models as a rare, magnetic, ecstatic persona that invokes intense feelings of devotion and belief in bodies that escape any rational explanation. For example, during the Helmut Lang shoot, in intermediaries’ mobilisation of affective energy mesmerised onlookers. Its subsequent capture translated to an affective image, capable of provoking viewers’ recognition and consumption of the ethereal world inhabited by the cultural deity. Once an affective tie has been created, past research (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Belk et al. 1989; Elliott 1997; 1998; Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002; Belk et al.
2003; Joy and Sherry 2003) has illustrated how the viewer’s rational defences are eroded as (s)he experiences an intensified vitality whereupon (s)he is exalted to the higher world portrayed by the fictive narrative. In this transcendental state, the individual is made to feel and subsequently believe in the ethereality of the consumption experience and the deified aурatic qualities of those belonging to this world.

7.3 Incremental Theory Development

7.3.1 Introduction

Having led a theoretical and empirical exploration of cultural mediation during the first five chapters, Chapter Six delineated two core contributions of this research and one potential contribution pending further investigation, which I will now clarify. As noted, by adopting a non-representational approach, I position these contributions within the context of an affective economy. It has already been recognised by CCT research (Humphreys and Kozinets 2009) how technological advances have led to the bombardment of individuals with an infinite siege of images. Yet with only a finite capacity for attention, value is derived from channelling viewers’ attention. An affective economy of desire is an extension to this idea. As there is value in attention, similarly, I suggest there is significant value in the capacity to invoke intensified feeling and emotion in a society that has arguably become desensitised and emotionally numbed by the same technological advances. The mobilisation of affect not only captures attention but also commandeers the imagination. Thus, the capacity to invoke intensified emotions in bodies commands not only cultural value and legitimacy, but also elicits intense, spiritual-like responses of love and devotion from bodies around the cultural intermediary and the enchanting, affect-laden narrative animated.

I posit how the weakened grip of religion (arguably, also a narrative that compels belief in a higher reality) imbued bodies with a discontent that has been come a meliorated through the ‘salvation’ promised by the transcendent consumption experience. Individuals have thus come to place their faith (an affective investment) in authenticated narratives of utopian lifestyles within which their unfulfilled desires and aspirations are vicariously realised. It is thus important to note that in an affective economy, the consumption experience is framed within an archetype of fiction. As argued by Thompson (2002), advertising consistently appropriates fictional archetypes as a means of creating compelling stories and characters that provoke individuals’ identification with an alternate reality to which they can escape through consumption. Similar to how nostalgic stimuli embodied in images, narratives, music, scents,
possessions etc. (Belk 1988; Stern 1992; Goulding 1999; 2002; Holbrook and Schindler 1989; 1991) can invoke an intense longing in viewers’. I suggest that the affective charge of a high fashion consumption experience is a mimetic representation of an intensely felt emotion (and hence, reality) that pervade bodies’ resonances. That is, the affective attachment invoked by the stimulus rekindles past emotions and experiences in the viewer (Goulding 1999; 2001; 2002) and anchors these to the existing consumption experience via contamination/contagion.

With regard to high fashion, the archetypal narrative is one bound up in artistic ideologies. Art by its nature conveys cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985) in that it demands cultural capital to ‘understand’ and appreciate it. It is also an emancipatory and moving experience (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008) as it depicts imaginary narratives from which individuals make interpretations as to the character of the artist, their muse, and the world to which they belong. Brands are increasingly beginning to adopt fictional narratives such as short art films within which celebrities and fashion models are no longer themselves, but rather, embody different characters51. An example is a recent black and white short film/advert (2014) for Dolce & Gabanna entitled ‘Street of Dreams’. The film stars Matthew McConaughey and Scarlett Johansson and is directed by Martin Scorsese. The pair play lovers who are reunited after years apart. As in the Helmut Lang shoot, there is a distinct energy between the pair that stimulates an affective response in the viewer. Woven around these affective stimuli (the energy exuded by the pair) is the narrative’s romantic, mysterious plot and the iconic shots of New York City streets. As the affective economy becomes increasingly prevalent, I argue that understanding of cultural intermediaries’ capacity to animate affect-laden narratives that trigger consumers’ affective resonances will become all the more critical to consumer research.

51 Appendix F
1999: 130). These affective properties seduce viewers into submitting to the charms of the consumption experience. Upon becoming enchanted, viewers are exalted to a higher world where the discontent imposed by present, objective reality is abolished. The affectively charged representations of a transcendent consumption experience now constitute viewers’ emotional capital due to the affective tie forged by cultural intermediaries. Obviously, given the premium placed on affect in late capitalist consumer culture, I have developed my research questions and subsequent contributions around how cultural intermediaries’ mobilise these intensities to create an affective tie between bodies and the aesthetic consumption experience.

7.3.2 Main Contribution

To briefly re-cap, the core question posed by this research is; how do cultural intermediaries’ mobilise affect? From my empirical data, I interpret affect as integral to shaping aesthetic consumption experiences due to its capacity to impact the perceptions and embodied dispositions of those to whom it contagiously adheres. To further articulate this point, I conceptualise the look as a conduit through which affective intensities flow. The look is best understood as an assemblage of the various forms of capital discussed, personalities, impactful experiences, affective states, consumption and production experiences etc. Cultural intermediaries mobilise affect by effortlessly opening their bodies to being affected by the energies that pervade the atmosphere, which through the contagious nature of affect, facilitates their reflection, reinvigoration and mobilisation of past intensified states.

The fluidity with which they circulate these energies can provoke an affective response from bodies in relation, during which time they (bodies in relation) become enchanted to project a ‘magical’ aura upon the intermediary (that which triggered their affective resonances) and the consumption experience that has become ‘real’ through contamination. To articulate this aim within a context of consumption and cultural mediation, I adopted the theoretical framework forwarded by Smith-Maguire and Matthews (2012). As I have mentioned, I strengthened the foundations of this framework based on some existing theoretical propositions from sociology and fashion literature. Through a non-representational mode of theorising (Hill et al. 2014) cultural mediation, I utilised this framework to answer three sub-questions that permeate my core research question.

The first of which is; how does cultural intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect frame the consumption experience? Affect is crucial to the framing process as it forges the connection with bodies in relation that legitimates, in their imagination, the ethereality, authenticity and
desirability of the consumption experience. The affective tie forged by intermediaries frames the model life within a narrative predicated on extraordinariness, purity and unique artistry. The aura of deification projected from the intensities felt during consumption romanticises and mystifies the reality depicted as distinct and belonging to a higher order.

Having identified the various laborious processes that produce this ‘magic’ (Arnould and Price 1993), a critical aspect of framing is that it appears effortless. Effortlessness bestows upon intermediaries, a consecrated purity (Bourdieu 1985) that evokes a clear otherness from end-consumers and detachment from their ordinary world. Ceremonies of consecration facilitate the framing of consumption as they reinforce intermediaries’ deified cultural status. That is, these individuals become (further) endowed with ‘special powers’ based on their recognised (felt) affective capacity. Importantly, evidence of their consecration and subsequent cultural differentiation from the majority must be proliferated, as an affective tie is ‘produced only as an effect of its circulation’ (Ahmed 2004: 120). Cultural intermediaries therefore accrue greater affective capacity as they are promoted in culturally legitimate circuits of value i.e. the basis of an attention economy.

Furthermore, as part of conveying ‘effortlessness’, cultural intermediaries’ misrecognise (Bourdieu 1996) their labour in order to retain the spiritual aura projected upon them by consecration. Their embodied belief in the authentic, transcendent reality of the model life is manifest through their stylistic consumption and production processes which in turn, charge the experience with affect. The rarity and naturalness with which intermediaries mediate this belief frames the consumption experience within a narrative of consecration and deification that is inconceivable to the rational, cognitive mind. Instead, it invokes an aesthetic experience constituted by felt affective intensities that provoke spiritually pure, transcendent and extraordinary emotions.

The second sub-question addressed was; *how do cultural intermediaries develop their expertise for the mobilisation of affect?* I conceptualised the expertise of cultural intermediaries as an affective capacity that is perceived innate or natural, yet, which is actually determined by one’s habitus and thus, I learned or ingrained from past affective experiences. The rare affective capacity evoked by cultural intermediaries distinguishes their status from the majority and affirms their cultural legitimacy. I introduced two primary ways through which cultural intermediaries develop their expertise. The first of which is by becoming culturally consecrated.

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Consecration also bestows cultural intermediaries with distinctive forms of capital that affirms their legitimacy (Bourdieu 1985) and thus, their capacity to influence others’ perceptions of aesthetic taste (Smith-Maguire and Matthews 2012). The various forms of capital amassed from these ceremonies is crucial as it endows cultural intermediaries with a tacit knowledge of how to work with imaging technologies in allowing their bodies to remain open to affect and being affected (simultaneous processes during the mobilisation of affective energies). For instance, their cultural capital facilitates a rare capacity to effortlessly weave affect-laden narratives for bodies in relation who then project an aura of deification upon the intermediary and their world. The consecrated intermediary is thus emancipated from the mundane, ordinary reality in which the majority dwell and elevated to a higher order of mystique and reverie.

In addition to this, I have also conceptualised emotional capital (combined with social and symbolic) derived from epiphanic experiences as an integral aspect of expertise. Kozinets and Handelman (2004) observe how such experiences contain spiritual significance due to the rarity and mystique they bestow upon individuals. The emotional capital gained from these unique experiences constitute an intermediary’s habitus, wherefrom these intensified affective states can (on the condition the individual also possesses requisite cultural capital) be reanimated to impact bodies in relation and forge an affective tie. The expert capacity to control and channel these volatile affective energies by remaining open to affect/being affected mobilises these influential intensities and provokes a response from bodies in relation through contagion.

This leads to a third point within this contribution that has addressed the question; can we identify the impact made by the mobilisation of affect? The expertise with which cultural intermediaries mobilise affect ‘impacts’ bodies in relation. In doing so, impact shapes their dispositions, influencing their perceptions and creating an affective attachment to the consumption experience. I delineated the impact felt by bodies based on three interrelated aspects. I conceptualised the initial phase of impact as an affective response. This occurs beneath conscious awareness and refers to an embodied form of engagement with the aesthetic experience. During the moment of affective response, individuals’ embodied dispositions are altered and a more favourable reality/experience consumed through imagination.

Upon provocation, bodies experience ‘enchantment’; a transcendent state of bliss, the result of having one’s affective resonances triggered by the appropriate stimulus. As it appeals to the imagination, enchantment is inherently non-rational. Its constitution of affective intensities obliterates the distinction between real and imaginary, as the fictive narrative mediated
becomes increasingly authentic. The enchanted body begins to believe in this narrative as (s)he inhabits the imagined world animated by the cultural intermediary. The affective intensities felt during enchantment contaminate the aesthetic experience, making it resonate with bodies.

I conceptualise resonance as an en during, intensified affective attachment felt toward the consumption experience which stems from being afforded the capacity to imaginatively engage with one’s deepest, unfulfilled desires, aspirations and dreams. The affective intensities felt during this ethereal experience are pinned to the body where they now pervade viewers’ emotional capital (or affective resonances). When triggered by affective stimuli, these energies invoke an intense, imaginative experience that culminates in the inevitable return to objective reality. To stave off disenchantment, the intensity of the experience often materialises as a conscious emotion, i.e. desire, which acts as an enduring support for the legitimacy of the illusory consumption experience.

7.3.3 Second Contribution

A second contribution of this research extends current understandings of ‘the model life’ (Parmentier and Fischer 2007) beyond a literal commodity, by conceptualising it as a transcendent reality, the spiritual characteristics of which are embodied by the cultural intermediary’s look. Specifically, my empirical findings have observed interconnectedness between art and sacredness that convene to animate the aesthetic experience of the model life. I have interpreted high fashion’s appropriation of artistic principles (Venkatesh et al. 2010; Dion and Arnould 2011; Joy et al. 2014) as a method of preserving the veil of sacredness that enshrouds the model life and its subsequent existence within a alternate reality. Cultural intermediaries are therefore evangelists of the model life as their look embodies the communion between art and sacredness, which in turn, mobilises highly charged intensities that mediate this transcendent experience to bodies through affective contagion. By deconstructing the look based on its artistic and sacred properties, we can make further interpretations as to the affect-laden narrative of consecration and deification that is, the model life.

Detached from the profane dullness of everyday life, the look of one that embodies the model life possesses a artistic ‘soul’, from the depths of which spring overwhelming, affective intensities capable of altering bodies’ dispositions and perceptions of reality. In this field of restricted production (Bourdieu 1985), consecration of such an affecting presence solidifies her/his prophetic qualities, making these attributes appear to exist innately within. The look becomes bestowed with a preordained, evangelical quality that only those with the requisite
cultural capital believe in and deify. Consecration therefore elevates individuals beyond the quotididian world to a higher, more privileged reality. The model life is therefore one of extreme cultural rarity (Parmentier and Fischer 2007), the value of which is aesthetic (transcendent, non-rational, emotional vitality), stemming from ceremonies of consecration and deification rather than culturally profane, material pursuits such as wealth, fame and notorious celebrity. It is a lifestyle of hedonistic freedom, where culturally taboo practices are performed ritualistically to maintain its sacred aura.

While the majority of consumers do not possess sufficient capital for entry, this era of ‘imaginative hedonism’ (Campbell 1987) has bestowed them with enough literacy that they are susceptible to the captivating charms of the affective narrative. That is, the artistic ideologies of rarity, purity, and transcendence frame these sacred properties to produce enchanting narratives of consecration and deification that become animated in the imagination of bodies through intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect. Cultural mediation contaminates the experience with intensities that would otherwise not be felt outside of this frame. Thus, the look establishes an affective, spiritual connection between bodies in relation and the model life. This tie is held together by the ‘pure’ in intensities felt and the authenticated, transcendent reality to which cultural intermediaries lead enchanted individuals via imagination.

7.3.4 Potential Contribution

I framed my third contribution as ‘potential’ in that it produces interpretations regarding the overall consumption experience and therefore, necessitates the incorporation of both a consumer and brand perspective. However, this potential contribution does provide ground upon which to expand from the initial argument made here. The basis of this contribution stems from my empirical findings and a call to reconsider that which cultural intermediaries actually do when they frame the consumption experience. For instance, a non-representational exploration of cultural mediation would suggest that intermediaries do not transfer meaning. This is a consumer endeavour (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Rather, in affective economy, cultural intermediaries impact bodies directly through affect. Their mobilisation of affect contaminates the consumption experience, making it resonate with consumers’ deepest emotions, thereby triggering their dreams of perfect moments (Campbell 1987).

Brands generate value by attempting to have a sense of the affective intensities of cultural intermediaries (Holt 2002; Carah 2014). Through contagion, they are endowed with affective qualities and become inseparable from the transcendent reality embodied by the cultural
intermediary. In this sense, to limit intermediaries’ impact on consumption to the transfer of meaning severely limits our potential understanding of their cultural significance to the consumption experience. For having become affected, the consumer exhibits a non-rational response wherein (s)he believes in, and subsequently consumes the fictitious, branded promise that her/his desires for recognition can be fulfilled through imagination.

However, it is important to acknowledge the role of meaning to the consumption experience. While I do not position meaning as a trigger of affective resonances, it is inextricably linked with affect and thus, to the aesthetic consumption experience. As mentioned in Chapter Three, affect is a precursor to meaning as we can only capture it as a representation (O’Sullivan 2001). Thus, I posit the symbolic value conferred upon the consumption experience is a representation of the intense emotional response felt upon impact with an affective stimulus (i.e. the affecting presence embodied by the look). In this sense, affect shapes representation. In other words, intermediaries’ mobilisation of affect impacts consumers’ embodied dispositions, which in turn influences the meaning they interpret and place upon the consumption experience.

In an affective economy, meaning remains critical for its capacity to provide justification and support for a non-rational, imaginative belief in the promise of a better life that will never come to fruition. Individuals’ desire can be further conceptualised as triggered by intermediaries’ creation of an affective tie—the moment between bodies’ recognition of, and belief in the imagined subject position and the disenchantment felt upon a return to conscious, objective reality. Meaning works to ameliorate this inevitable disillusionment, while the mobilisation of affect from which meaning stems, perpetually forges, breaks and reanimates bodies’ affective attachments felt to ephemeral ‘in fashion’ consumption experiences.

7.4 Future Research

7.4.1 Non-Representational Approaches

As noted, this research has adopted a non-representational mode of theorising mediation to expose the air of mystique that enshrouds the field of high fashion and its cultural agents. Supportive of the stance adopted by Hill et al. (2014), this work argues for greater attention to non-representational methods of understanding consumption. In an affective economy, representational theory is limited in the extent to which it can help us understand the imaginative aspects of consumption. Particularly from a cultural mediation perspective, it cannot fully articulate the nature of the felt intensities that influence consumption. While I am
not suggesting we abandon representational theory, in order to grasp a more vivid illustration of the aesthetic consumption experience, we must appreciate the nature of our affective economy and adopt a supplementary, non-representational approach by which to capture these non-rational, volatile and embodied intensities.

For instance, this research has adopted a broader approach to understand the mediation of the consumption experience by focusing on pre\textsuperscript{52} and post\textsuperscript{53} mediation, as well as the embodied movements during ‘the moment’ of mediation that mobilise affect. These representations illustrate a context wherein the affective energies produced by ‘more than human’ (Hill et al. 2014: 384; Lorimer 2005) voices contagiously affect intermediaries, which in turn, result in their modulation of affect (via their unique capacity to act as conduits for affective flow). The representations depicted by this research might be fruitfully bolstered through the addition of onflow. According to Hill et al. (2014), onflow accounts provide highly detailed illustrations of the consumption experience— the range of affective intensities that pervade the atmosphere, the subsequent movement of bodies as they appropriate objects, spaces etc. There are examples of onflow illustrated by this research within the preface and also at the beginning of Chapters Four and Five. Future research might consider an expansion of this method of illustration beyond an introductory passage to encapsulate an entire study.

To complement this approach, the adoption of ethnographic and participant observatory methods is encouraged to develop our sensitivities to the ‘habits, routines and embodied rhythmic attunements’ (Hill et al. 2014: 386) of cultural intermediaries as they mobilise affect and mediate aesthetic taste. These methods will further help to grasp the embodied assemblages of these daily, unnoticed processes as they subtly materialise in ways that would otherwise go undetected. As such, these approaches involve ‘represencing’ instances that normally escape attention (Dewsbury 2003: 1907; Hill et al. 2014). This necessitates becoming aware of not just representational instances that influence behaviour but also reflecting on one’s habitus and how it interacts with the affective environment. As noted by Thrift (2000), one particular context is the examination of instances during which there are ‘breaches’ to everyday life that expose the dialogue between the affective body and its environment\textsuperscript{54}.

\textsuperscript{52} Such as reflection on epiphanic experiences that are reiterated through an imaginative lens and thus, belonging to a different world from the one in which they initially took place.

\textsuperscript{53} Having become captivated, participants descriptions of ‘falling in love’ or belonging to a higher order at ceremonies of consecration and deification. The movement of bodies at these ceremonies mobilises affect.

\textsuperscript{54} An example of such would be a model falling while attempting to walk to runway.
A further suggestion to augment the efficacy of these non-representational methodologies is with personal introspection that seeks to ‘build descriptions of the inbetween-ness of atmospheres and affects’ (Hill et al. 2014: 388, original emphasis). For instance, a main criticism from those sceptical of this approach is the difficulty with which we might capture affect given that it can only be experienced. In Chapter Three, I observed how affect is momentary and thus, any experience of it fleeting. Yet the intensified impact with which these experiences lacerate our bodies leaves a permanent mark on our habitus. Ethnographic studies of onflow combined with personal introspection would therefore add significant insight into these intangible energies that influence behaviour in ways that go largely unnoticed. Moreover, a suitable way by which to articulate and make sense of these impactful experiences/observations is through narrative. Rather than use these experiences to generate ideas for research (which they inevitably do), I suggest they be included and delineated as the basis for research topics and from which we can make interpretations. Their documentation would yield significant value and contribution to how we understand the affective connection necessary for aesthetic consumption in the contemporary era.

7.4.2 Consumers, Producers and Brands

As evidenced by my potential contribution, in order to illustrate a clear portrait of the aesthetic consumption experience, we must understand the interaction that occurs between producers, consumers and brands. As consumers are not passive dupes, but rather, critically engage with cultural discourses (Arnould and Thompson 2005), their agency valorises certain meanings which attach to the brand during consumption. However, to capture consumers’ attention in the initial instance, and influence their interpretation, demands their affective resonances be triggered. This necessitates a producer (cultural intermediary). Furthermore, cultural intermediaries’ capacity to mobilise the affective energies that trigger consumers’ emotions is harnessed by brands. That is, they channel the affective capacity of cultural intermediaries to make this connection with consumers. Upon doing so, I interpret that the brand be comes contaminated with the affective qualities of the cultural intermediary, where it now resembles an affective ‘character’. In other words, the once hollow brand is bestowed ‘personality’ with which it can trigger the desires and aspirations of consumers to create value. A non-representational study that combines these three aspects is vital in order to better contextualise the complementary correlation between affect and meaning to the aesthetic consumption experience.
7.4.3 Cultural Intermediaries

While I have argued above for greater appreciation of the various parties that constitute the aesthetic experience, there remains a significant need to place further attention on the labour of cultural intermediaries. For instance, in CCT (until now), there has remained a romanticised veil around how the aesthetic experience is mediated to consumers. I have noted how as a process, the mobilisation of affect has been equated to ‘sorcery’ and intermediaries as ‘merchants of mystique’ (Belk et al. 2003). Yet, to add some clarity to this process, I have embraced the framework introduced by Smith-Matthews and Maguire (2012) that delineates this ‘sorcery’ based on framing, expertise and impact. The non-representational approach that underpins this framework has revealed the ‘magic’ of high fashion to be an illusion, a mysterious veil woven by intermediaries’ expert mobilisation of affect. Therefore, as I have done, I would encourage further research to augment this framework based on their empirical findings. However, a point worth acknowledging is that in analysing the processes behind the ‘magic’, we expose the hedonic, imaginative illusions that we have come to enjoy and to a large extent, depend on. In doing so, we shatter the enchanting, transcendent air of reverie that enshrouds the aesthetic consumption experience.
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Appendices

Appendix A:

Dior
Christophe Josse

Givenchy
Appendix B:

H&M

Levis
Appendix C:

*Louis Vuitton* Paris Fashion Week ‘13
Louis Vuitton Fashion Show ‘12

Tom Ford

TOM FORD MENSWEAR
Appendix D:

*Isabel Laurent* Collaboration
Givenchy Collaboration
Lanvin Collaboration
Appendix E:

Roxy ‘Pro Biarritz 2013’ #WhoAmIJustGuess Campaign.

Appendix F:

George Craig (middle) - Burberry ‘The Beat’ 2008 S/S Campaign.
Appendix G:

Polaroid of Ashley ‘Ash’ Stymest.

Appendix H: Dolce & Gabanna Short Film ‘Street of Dreams’