The affective moment has passed in that it is no longer enough to observe that affect is important; in that sense at least we are in the moment after the affective moment. That this is the case can I think be demonstrated in several ways. One is the wealth of studies that are now appearing that are concerned with the analysis of specific forms of affect as a means of investigating particular political-cum-cultural situations (for example, Berlant 2004, 2006, 2007a; Gallop 2006; Ngai 2005; Stewart 2007; Thrailkill 2007). Another is the way in which specific theoretical and methodological traditions that have taken affect to be a crucial element of their makeup have begun to deepen their analyses, whether that be the case of the Italian operaismo tradition’s use of the twinned notions of immaterial and affective labor (for example, Berlant 2007b, Dowling, Nunes, and Trott 2007) or more conventional accounts of the hidden injuries of class (for example, Reay 2005). Yet another is the way in which the affective moment has begun to produce its own wares, which are becoming an accepted part of the environment we inhabit: in particular, I am thinking here of recent excursions in installation and site-specific and conversational and par-
ticipatory art, which, though they take their inspiration from particular
theories of affect, turn out to be much more than simple extensions of these
theories (for example, Bishop 2005). Then, finally, there is the way in which
affect has simply become an accepted background to so much work, a neces-
sary part of the firmament through which the forms and shifts of any
analysis are extruded.

This essay fits into this latter category. In particular, it follows the path
first laid down by Gabriel Tarde in understanding economies as being about
the generation of passionate interests (Barry and Thrift 2007). It follows
from Tarde’s account that economies must be engaging; they must generate
or scoop up affects and then aggregate and amplify them in order to produce
value, and that must involve producing various mechanisms of fascination.
The economy is not, and never has been, a dismal science of simple profit
and loss (although many of its effects are no doubt dismal). Tarde’s account
is only underlined by a situation of growing affluence wherein the difference
between products and environments is often slight. In a crowded marke-
place, the practices of aesthetics may be the only way to make a product or
environment stand out from the crowd, especially given a growing emphasis
on individual identity and individual style. In other words, the ability to
generate a certain kind of secular magic that can act as a means of willing
captivation becomes a key means of producing dividends.¹

This essay is therefore concerned with how imagination of the com-
modity is being captured and bent to capitalist means through a series of
“magical” technologies of public intimacy, most of them with long historical
genealogies. Each of these technologies demonstrates the singular quality of
allure through the establishment of human-nonhuman fields of captivation,
for what seems certain is that many of the objects and environments that
capitalism produces have to demonstrate the calculated sincerity of allure if
people are to be attracted to them: they need to manifest a particular style
that generates enchantment without supernaturalism. Currently, I argue,
this quality of allure is being applied in all kinds of new ways, producing a
more magical world that is also, at one and the same time, more calculated.
In the process, new “intangible” value is being generated for industries that
are already some of the world’s key means of making money.

The essay is therefore structured in three parts. The first part establishes
the ground for the argument by addressing the question of aesthetics as the
hallmark of allure and one of the main means by which allure circulates,
namely through the institutions of public intimacy (or what is sometimes
called "extimacy"). The second part considers one particular form of the technology of allure, namely glamour. I will argue that this form of allure blurs the boundary between person and thing in order to produce greater captivation, in ways that are more often thought to be typical of certain Micronesian cultures where, for example, bodies do not exist as autonomous entities but have the capacity to act directly upon one another: persons are "fractal," able to incorporate others and parts of others (Bamford 2007). I will illustrate this contention by dint of two examples of colorful materials that cling to and transform glamour, respectively new designs of environment and hair. These examples both underline how the object world intervenes forcefully in the world's being there, as materials that occupy a zone that is neither alive nor dead, rather than being an exclusively human projection, and lead into the ways in which capitalism is currently involved in "worlding." Whether these developments are a matter for despair I leave until the concluding section of the essay, where I briefly address questions of aesthetics and morality.

Imagination and Aesthetics

Contemporary capitalism's magical powers arise from two intersecting imaginary forces, namely the force of aesthetic practices, honed now over a number of centuries, and the rise of so-called public intimacy, a series of practices with an equally long historical bloodline. Let me begin by touching on the practical aesthetic imagination.

It is crucial to note here that aesthetics is understood as a fundamental element of human life and not just an additional luxury, a frivolous add-on when times are good. Postrel puts it thus:

Aesthetics is the way we communicate through the senses. It is the art of creating reactions without words, through the look and feel of people, places, and things. Hence, aesthetics differs from entertainment that requires cognitive engagement with narrative, word play, or complex, intellectual allusion. While the sound of poetry is arguably aesthetic, the meaning is not. Spectacular special effects and beautiful movie stars enhance box-office success in foreign markets because they offer universal aesthetic pleasure; clever dialogue which is cognitive and culture-bound doesn't travel as well. Aesthetics may complement storytelling, but is not itself narrative. Aesthetics shows rather than tells, delights rather than instructs. The effects are immediate, perceptual, and emotional. (2003, 6)
The point is that aesthetic pleasure has quality and substance that is generated by that side of sensation that is sheer formless enjoyment (Harman 2005). It is an affective force that is active, intelligible, and has genuine efficacy: it is both moved and moving (Thrift forthcoming). It is a force that generates sensory and emotional gratification. It is a force that produces shared capacity and commonality. It is a force that, though cross-cut by all kinds of impulses, has its own intrinsic value.

Aesthetic practices can take on a number of forms but among their chief expressions must surely be the vast spectrum of consumer objects that, as numerous ethnographies have shown, are able to produce all kinds of affective allegiances. Aesthetics is bound up with the discovery of new and alluring imaginative territories that reflect upon themselves. Though these territories are usually vicarious they are no less real for that. Goods are a substantial part of this process of imaginative exploration. From early on, goods have provided a sensual means of inhabitation that is also a means of captivation. As elements of aesthetic experience, they do not just provide evocations of times past or moral reckonings but affective senses of space, literally territories of feeling.

But in making such a claim about aesthetic enhancement, I want to go one stage further for I also want to claim that the aesthetic objects have their own existence. As Thrailkill puts it, aesthetic objects are “more than telegraphs of meaning that either are received as a form of penetration or possession (‘sink[ing] right into your brainstem’ as Walter Michaels writes) or remain forever unread, unreceived, and unrecognised (‘we cannot know each other’, as Janet Malcolm puts this position)” (2007, 250). Thus, on one level, they are, as I have pointed out, connection machines, technologies that facilitate imaginary recognitions. But on another level they inhabit a separate existence. Qualities can belong to objects themselves rather than to our consciousness of them; they are not inert targets for our thoughts to animate (Harman 2005). In other words, I want to make space for the stuff of aesthetics as not just about human access to objects. Objects must be understood as involved in multiple overlapping negotiations with human being and not just as sets of passive and inanimate properties.

The power of objects is crucial to the account of aesthetics that I want to give, so I will expand upon this point. Objects are not there simply to furnish a human world as a feature of human perception that follows us around wherever we may be, only existing when chaperoned by a human subject (Harman 2005). They are a feature of reality itself that can be deployed at
many levels at once, some of which intersect with the homeland of human presence and perception, some of which do not. They are, as Harman (2005) would have it, "phosphorescent." Thus, the human contains all manner of objects within its envelope but it does not exhaust their presence, so that objects can signal in all kinds of ways that we may only partially perceive, or perceive as "magical" in that they provide associations and conjunctions, dissociations and echoes, that stimulate perception and imagination and, indeed, enjoyment. They allow us to create mental objects that can be briefly fixed, not only achieving a contouring of perceptions but also allowing these perceptions to ripple out as surges of affect (Stafford 2007). Contemporary art works have struggled precisely to illuminate these qualities, producing diagrams and animated tableaux that briefly stabilize a continuously mutating process.

While we need to be careful about arguing that more goods exist now than ever before or that they have increased in importance, something has changed in the last thirty years or so. Affluence has become much more general, in part because of the invention of lifestyle consumption, which stresses the expressive freedom of the individual and specifically an aesthetic economy that has generated ever-increasing value (Binkley 2007). This individualization of consumption, and the conformist nonconformity that arrived with it, produced not only a much greater emphasis on aesthetics in its own right but a number of other aesthetic results too. The first was the generalization of style. There is no one style of aesthetic expression that is now regnant. Rather, rigid hierarchies have broken down and a whole series of styles coexist. There is no one best way. A kind of aesthetic pluralism has become dominant. The second result was a much greater concentration on affect as a key to aesthetic design. As Postrel points out, "form follows function" has been supplanted by "form follows emotion" (2003, 9). The third result was an unparalleled aesthetic plenitude as once rigid style hierarchies have broken down. Fueled by rising incomes and falling prices, as well as more efficient methods of distribution and new product sources, something like a state of aesthetic abundance has been reached and that abundance reaches into the working class. Capitalist firms have both driven these developments with their attempts to produce market segmentation and customization and been forced to follow them: the attention recently to getting to know customers via the Internet is not just a commercial strategy but a sometimes desperate attempt to keep up with what customers' changing needs and wants may be. What follows is that we live in an expressive age in which
aesthetics is both a key social moment and a key means of generating economic value (Lash and Lury 2007).

But, or so I will argue, my account cannot be complete without pointing to the evolution of another key imaginary force, namely the rise of public intimacy provided by the continuous development of new media forms. Again, I want to start back in the long eighteenth century with the decisive popular fusion of sensibility and taste, what would now be thought of as emotional susceptibility and aesthetic expression (Ellison 1999). The affective and the aesthetic were bound together by a code of intimacy, but it was a peculiar kind of intimacy. At this time the Western pact of intimacy was finally sealed.

In other words the public sphere is increasingly used to communicate what were once regarded as private passions. While once such a means of proceeding had been confined to the seventeenth-century stage, when both the prologues and epilogues of plays might allude to the sex lives of their renowned actresses offstage, thereby allowing both foreground and background to intermingle in a new combination, it has now become a routine form of sociability, amplified by the Internet and its numerous means of producing synthetic experience, experience that is fabricated to imitate or replace unobtainable realities and which, in the process, becomes a reality itself.

There are several ways of interpreting this state of affairs, of course. One is procedural: the always suspect divide between the social and psychological has broken down for good (Latour 2007). Another is based in critique: we live in a world of inward-looking consumer monads that are, as Sloterdijk (2007) puts it, “interidiotically” stable, endlessly repeating themselves in a frenzy of seemingly original but actually standardized affective gestures. Another is economic: public intimacy has a value and profit can be got from it. Whatever the case, there is evidence that public intimacy is now becoming an even more important impulse. We need to be careful in making such a historical judgment, of course, but the sheer weight of aesthetic machinery of public intimacy that is now available, the result especially of the preponderance of information technology, new materials that allow new surfaces to be produced, and new means of making connections, is currently of such consequence that it does more than intermediate. It generates the potential to produce a new range of means of sensing objects, not least by producing new forms of allure.

The result of the intertwining of these two imaginary forces is clear.
Aesthetics and public intimacy are being intertwined in new ways as part of what I call “worlds,” spaces formed by capitalism whose aim is not to create subjects (as happened in the older disciplinary regimens) so much as the world within which the subject exists (Lazzarato 2004). These spaces can be understood as new forms of body with the capacity to alert us to that which was previously unable to be sensed—with the obvious corollary that certain objects can no longer be sensed—so producing the potential to generate new kinds of charm.

Now, by using the term worlds, I do not just mean the ability to produce customized environments, often designed down to the last tile, of the kind found in some malls, theme parks, and indeed computer games. I mean the ability to produce more generally digestible environments filled with objects that provide messages that employ all kinds of aesthetic norm. These messages are often diffuse because what are being brought together are things, not properties. But sometimes they cohere into a system that actively shapes intelligibility, what Harman calls a “cryptic totality” (2005). Such a viewpoint is akin to that of Max Black, who observes that the meaning of wolf is really “a wolf-system of related commonplaces.” In other words, “In most cases there is not one wolf-quality in particular that catches our eye, since the metaphor leaves vague exactly what we are supposed to look at. Instead, there is a kind of electrical infrastructure of half-intuited wolf-marks and wolf-tokens” (quoted in Harman 2005, 119).

Thus, worlds have their own practices of rendering prominent, which bring together humans and nonhumans in all kinds of distributed combinations, giving rise to a particular style of going on that consequently focuses passions. These distributed combinations will be full of stock characters and icons, surfaces and colors, which feed on a particular historical unconscious. And they can trigger off all kinds of effervescent imitative behaviors, mimetic fields that can spread rapidly (Thrift forthcoming). But as the wolf example makes clear, worlds do not have to be designed down to the last detail or be complete and completed totalities, as once was often the case. And this means that their spatial character can be diffuse. It might be that sometimes a bounded space exactly corresponds to a world. More likely, though, a world will be a series of lines of association crisscrossing those of other worlds but occupying some of the same spaces, even if fleetingly.

In particular, the imagination can be captured and guided by a whole set of affective devices that are now able to be introduced into these worlds in ways that would have been difficult before—new kinds of cultural nerve, if
you like, which build extra facets of “you.” The invention of melodrama in the nineteenth century, the reinvention of the decisive moment as a result of photography and cinema in the early twentieth century, the allure of the extreme in the late twentieth century, all come to mind as examples of ways in which (if it is not a contradiction in terms) a nondiscursive narrative intelligence has gradually been developed, which allows the passions to be deployed to economic advantage by allowing consumer situations to be “‘moved’ in the dual sense of emotionally engaged and repositioned with respect to the world” (Thrailkill 2006, 366, emphasis added). The restlessness of the imagination becomes an asset that can be valorized as everyday life becomes a cavalcade of aesthetically charged moments that can be used for profit, not least because every surface communicates.

In other words, I want to argue that nowadays the allure in allure is largely produced by the creation of worlds in which the boundaries between alive and not alive and material and immaterial have become increasingly blurred, so that what was considered as alive can become thing-like and what was considered as dead is able to show signs of life. I am not arguing that these lifelike objects are considered to be alive, but neither are they considered to be mere evocations. They are allowed a psychology (Turkle 2005). And because of their uncertain status, they are able to fascinate, that is to stimulate explorations of their nature and character because they are able to arouse repeated interest or stimulate curiosity. In the next section, I will attempt to illustrate the way that capitalism has played with these boundaries in order to produce semblances of life, likenesses that have a certain spectral quality that is undoubtedly about show and indeed calculation—and yet which still holds us in its grip.

Technologies of Glamour

So how does capitalism make its mark on the aesthetic sphere? What is the source of value? And how does it operationalize it? I want to pick out two technologies that act as crucial parts of the generation of allure, a quality that like other forms of charm limits and fixes our vision but also acts as a tool of exploration. Both technologies might be considered as magical in the sense that they seem to have a life of their own, part human, part something else. And that is exactly the point: they do. If we had to describe this kindred, magical quality, it might be better to describe it through the descriptor of style.
However, style does not consist of a list of factors that have to be ticked off, nor does it constitute a totality of meaning. *Style is a modification of being that produces captivation, in part through our own explorations of it.* Style wants us to love it and we want to be charmed by it; we want to emulate it, we want to be definite about it, we want to be absorbed by it, we want to lend ourselves to what it has become. Style, in other words, can be counted as an agent in its own right in that it defines what is at issue in the world that we can engage with (Harman 2005). With this minimal definition in play we can now move on to consider how capitalism captivates by addressing a specific style of allure, namely *glamour*.

Glamour is a constant if fitful quality in consumer spaces, arising out of an environment that mixes human and nonhuman so as to produce captivation. But where did glamour originate from? How did it become an affective field that so many people feel inclined to explore? In this section and the next, I will recount a capsule history of glamour, and especially the role of theater, film, and performance, and try to set down why it has become more important and now has such a grip on Euro-American civilization.

Aﬄuence brings with it the construction of the quality of glamour as a key imaginary in producing allure. In using the term “glamour,” I am aware of a certain awkwardness of expression. But I need a term that operates in the everyday and as both an economic and an imaginative force, as (in its eighteenth-century meaning of magic or enchantment) a spell that is both erudite and occult but that can also encompass the nineteenth-century meaning of “a deceptive or bewitching beauty or charm” as well as its current usage, which denotes the spell cast by unobtainable realities. And glamour does this. For all its breathtaking qualities, glamour does not conjure up awe. It operates on a human scale, in the everyday, inviting just enough familiarity to engage the imagination, a glimpse of another life, utopia as a tactile presence: “lasting objects of perfection to be held in your hands” (Postrel 2005, 31). Glamour is about that special excitement and attractiveness that characterizes some objects and people. Glamour is a form of secular magic, conjured up by the commercial sphere. We might see it as a fetish, or as a means of feeling thought and tasting thought. What is clear is that we seek it out. And what is it that we are seeking out?

Glamour depends upon three cultural pillars. The first pillar is the object
effect: an object standing for a world without troubles or with troubles you want. One way of understanding this effect is as displaced meaning (McCracken 1996). As sources of identity and hope every culture displays ideals that can never be fully realized in everyday life, ideals that “may uphold incompatible principles, deny the relations of cause and effect, require impossible knowledge, or demand more emotionally contradictory behaviour than human beings can sustain” (Postrel 2003, 31). But these ideals can be glimpsed in the imaginary realm, not least as worlds in which these ideals can be realized—as fleeting daydreams and fantasies, or as more comprehensively worked out paradieses, utopias, and worlds to come—worlds in which stock characters, different stories of good or bad behavior, striking artifacts, compulsive geographies, and strong emotions make cherished imaginary abstractions seem attainable through their “unconscious poetry.” “When they are transported to a distant cultural domain, ideals are made to seem practicable realities. What is otherwise unsubstantiated and culturally improbable in the present world is now validated, somehow ‘proven’ by its existence in another, distant one” (McCracken 1996, 106).

These worlds count as synthetic experiences that are both a repository and a generator of vicarious experience, experience that occupies an imaginary space but that is no less real for that. They are “fictions that have taken up residence in reality” (Wood 2005, 12). Imagination is itself lived experience. But to understand imagination as experience requires a greater understanding of space.

The second pillar is engaging alternate versions of “me” that can act as a particular imaginary norm, often speculatively and in parallel, in order to realize a particular form of character (McCloskey 2006). This is a reflexivity based on the centrality of play with an “episodic self” (Stafford 2007). It consists of knowingly engaging in self-representation and receiving affirmation from an audience, as an actor does. But this time the audience is the self. What we see, in other words, is the creation of worlds of virtual self-difference that allow “extra-yous” to thrive; these “extra yous” are “at once subject and object, knower and known, representor and that which is being represented” (Thraillkill 2006, 382). These new yous constitute “a productively divided state of being in which one seeks or receives insight into one’s own perceptual experience” (Thraillkill 2006, 382). This state of being is restless and challenging. But it is also often pleasurable; the “you” takes pleasure in the “extra-you”—as in many cases of laughter where one is placed on good terms with oneself. And such a state of being comes with cer-
tain add-ons. The generation of “extra-yous” means that it is possible to be half-committed to a course of action while all the time commenting on it. Equally, it allows all kinds of worlds to exist, caught up with one another to a greater or lesser degree, each of which may have different cues.

Glamour’s third pillar is calculation but it is calculation that must go unnoticed. It must appear as effortless. Glamour requires a courtier’s nonchalance: “to practice in all things a certain sprezzatura, and so to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort” (Castiglione 1599, 43). So glamour is selling. It is manipulation. It is seduction. It is a certain form of deception. But it is something more too. It is meticulous selection and control. “The creator must edit out discordant details that could break the spell—blemishes on the skin, spots on the windows, electrical wires crossing the façade, piles of bills on the kitchen counter” (Postrel 2003, 28). From out of these and other conventions comes the ability to generate “fake” feeling. So, glamour betokens making what is difficult appear easy, it requires vitality but also sometimes steeley accuracy, it demands envy but also identification. In other words, glamour is concerned with gaining a willing acceptance of manipulation through “fake” feeling, the result, in particular, of the work done on the so-called negative feelings like envy, anxiety, and competitiveness, which both frame it and provide an analysis of the social field, however crude (Ngai 2005, 2006).

Worlds that are supported by these pillars increasingly go beyond the sequential process to be found in stories and other linear cognitive tools (see Thrift forthcoming) and attempt to make appeals directly at the neurophysiological level by tapping directly into the interface with objects, whether these be carefully designed goods that feel right, images, icons, and effigies that tap into couplings of objects and cultural ideals, or other “enactive symbols” (Stafford 2007), which are, of course, more than symbols. Rather, they are forms of lived experience. In past consumer societies, the object world only very rarely was sufficiently populous that it could routinely produce atmospheres. But, I would argue that this kind of world making has now become an activity that involves much more than just the individual commodity. Rather, it involves the proliferation of performative object-fictions, in which sight, taste, touch, and the other senses combine to trigger cognitive heritages we are only vaguely aware of, the result of a vast increase in the palette of materials that are on offer that are able to produce marketable materiality. The obvious arena to which to point in this regard is the worlds that have become possible because of information technology. But, instead of
following this particular aesthetic byway, I will point instead to the aesthetic possibilities that have arisen from new colored materials.

Glamorous Materials

There are many ways in which it is possible to produce glamour and I cannot fix on them all. Iconic experience like glamour is constructed from many building blocks. It can be sound. It can be the play of brilliant or subdued light. It can be powerful smells. It can be a haptic association. It can be pace. In this essay, I have chosen to alight on just one of the means of production of glamour, namely colorful materials. Straightaway, it is important to note that I take such materials as having their own resonance, not least because their appeal is mainly directly to the pre-personal domain in the form of movement sensations (Humphrey 2006). As Harman points out in discussing color, “There are qualities so free and nonteleological that they no longer even belong to specific things” (Harman 2005, 67) and color is one of these. Of course, color has a long history of manufacture and it is one of the key moments of aesthetics, understood as the sensual impression of light and color, whether found in Newton, Goethe, or the universal color symbolism of Berlin and Kay (Delamare and Guineau 2000, Leslie 2005, Pastoureau 2001). It may, indeed, be ingrained in us as a very part of how we are, as an element of archaic patterns of communication predicated on ritual and performance (Lewis-Williams 2004).

But what is at issue here is the ability to link certain colorful materials with the aesthetics of glamour in an unconscious poetry of substance. This is hardly a new phenomenon: but it has become a mass-produced phenomenon, especially since the first synthetic color was produced by Runge in 1833. Colored materials are, of course, central to the construction of worlds. Even computer-generated worlds attempt to animate texture and feel as key moments in generating a sense of reality. Much effort is expended on simulating surfaces like hair or fur, on getting particular liquids like milk or honey to flow properly, and on attaining accurate color effects. More generally, materials have been crucial to the generation of alluring spaces. Thus Benjamin’s arcades, often thought (mistakenly) to be the prototypical capitalist spaces, depended upon the availability of materials like glass, artificial gems, and mirrors to work their secular magic (Leslie 2005).

But what would prove equally as important as the glamorous consumer phosphorescence that spaces like the arcades unleashed was the ability to
produce colored materials, through an alliance of chemistry and art, thereby
unleashing an “empire of colours” (Leslie 2005). We do not, I suspect, understand just how colorful our current civilization is, whether the colors are to be found on screens, in food, in plastics, and so on. Almost anything is now able to be colored or pigmented, often using computer technology, which is intent on reaching the limits of human color perception: the average human observer can readily distinguish some one hundred thousand colors (Delamare and Guineau 2000), many of which have affective and symbolic attributes. Thus, certain colors have historically been glamorous, at least for a time. Think of a dye like mauve, which when it was invented in the nineteenth century became linked for a time with glamour (Garfield 2001). Or, continuing in this vein, think of the first synthetic plastic, Bakelite, invented in the early twentieth century, which went on to become a glamorous material, at least for a short time, in the 1920s and 1930s. But what is different now is that aesthetic effects can be achieved on a near-routine basis. The range of effects that can be summoned up is enormous. Take the example of colored plastics. Postrel (2003) describes the enormous colored plastic banks held by some large firms: GE Plastics now has more than a million colored plastics banked in its custom color bank and since 1995 it has introduced more than twenty new visual effects into its compounds and resins, including mother of pearl, diamond, speckled glass, and various kinds of metal and stone.

In turn, by using new colored materials like these and combining them with other surfaces it becomes possible to construct environments that are the contemporary equivalents of the glamorous worlds of the nineteenth-century arcade or the staged staircases constructed by Morris Lapidus in his hotels in the 1950s or the first malls and that have now given rise to new disciplines like surface architecture. These are totally designed environments that can exude glamour because every single detail is designed without tradeoffs or compromises in order to produce brand push (Klingmann 2007).

The prototype for these environments is in all probability Rem Koolhaas’s Prada “epicentre” store, which opened in New York in 2001, and which can be thought of as a spatial version of a brand. Koolhaas knowingly drew on various traditions of glamour to enliven these spaces, defining glamour as a means of capturing attention through the qualities of focus and clarity, the development of more intelligent objects, the power of tactile surfaces, and the use of unproductive, even excessive space (Koolhaas 2001). Prada stores based on these four principles have subsequently been rolled out in different
incarnations, using different architects in some cases, across the world. They are often regarded as installations that explore the idea of consumerism—and they are—but they are something else too: prototypes for worthing. They depend upon a carefully designed backbone that, incidentally, pays homage to both the stage (each store actually has a small stage area) and to the aforementioned Lapidus staircases, as well as acting as a spine for all kinds of adaptable infrastructure. As importantly, every part of their aesthetic has been designed to produce allure, down to and including materials of all kinds. For example, the Los Angeles store uses black and white marble, aluminum, zebrawood, gel waves, polyester screens, silicone bubbles, laminated glass that fades from translucent to transparent, and a new material specifically designed for Prada, called “sponge,” which can provide a porous artificial background. Equally, lighting has been carefully designed to interact with these materials. The eighty different kinds of light throw particular patterns and produce particular kinds of effect. The store is also loaded with information technology, which adds another surface. For example, dressing rooms are equipped with plasma screens that are invisibly built into the mirrored surface and allow customers to see front and behind, inventory screens linked to RFIDs display what items are in stock, and doors are made of glass that can switch from transparent to translucent. Then, finally, some of the surfaces move; for example, the lifts display goods while the showcases can move about.

But these spaces are now but a small part of practices of worthing; demonstrators whose concentration of innovations will gradually make their way into the smallest shop over time. What is more important about these spaces is the kind of ambition that they reveal. For they betray an ambition to produce spaces in which every surface communicates something (Thrift forthcoming). The kinds of colorful materials that exist will be part of this non-discursive writing. The combination of these colorful materials with other media has begun to make it possible to reliably activate all kinds of appeal, from the archaic to the newest inventions, thereby adding another layer of charm to glamour.

Glamorous Personas

Glamour is hardly just the domain of objects. It equally concerns persons, understood as fractal, that is as both singular and plural. A fractal person is never a unit standing in relation to an aggregate, or an aggregate standing in
relation to a unit, but always an entity with relationships integrally implied. The person lies in between a divisional rather than an individual. Persons do not exist as autonomous entities but have the capacity to act directly upon one another. And because persons are “fractal,” they are able to incorporate others and parts of others, including objects. This becomes particularly apparent when we consider how glamorous personas are constructed.

Nowadays the glamorous persona is often associated with high-end fashion. It involves a combination of sex appeal, luxury, celebrity, and wealth. Historically, the social bearer of glamour was the aristocracy. Now, however, the bearers of glamour tend to be celebrities. Of course, celebrity covers a host of sins—it consists of all manner of species and levels. But I want to concentrate on just one form of celebrity, namely charismatic celebrity of the kind found among major stars of stage and screen, certain (and by no means all) politicians, some sports stars, some top models, and the like.

Celebrity is, of course, a massive source of value in the modern world but it can be argued that it has roots that go some way back in historical time and these need to be examined to understand the current phenomenon. Thus, Roach (2007) has argued that glamour in its modern form was discovered in the theaters of seventeenth-century London with the invention of celebrity. In these theaters, a new form of public intimacy developed that was based around the celebration of the magical persona, which in turn was based on an interaction between the characters invented by playwrights and the talents of performers: “persona and personality oscillated between foreground and background with the speed of innuendo, intensified by the personal chemistry of the starring actors, igniting the precinematic It-effect” (Roach 2007, 16). Before long, glamour had become an almost routine manifestation, the result of the parallel rise of publishing and print media. Glamorous actors and actresses started to become familiars. Of course, photography and cinema produced a step change in what was possible, transporting the personas of celebrities to new dimensions and producing a more intimate sense of acquaintance that could still be counted magical but that was everywhere to be seen. However, it is debatable whether as much changed in the transition to the screen as is often made out. But one thing did change for certain: images became crucial in transporting an effortless gaze of public intimacy that is the main hallmark of the glamorous celebrity. Of course, that gaze is calculated in every way—from the stance of the body to clothes and hair, even in some cases to the events of the course of life—but that makes it no less potent. Glamorous celebrity has four main characteristics (Roach 2007).
First, it is a key manifestation of public intimacy, premised on the illusion of availability since apartness is so much a part of what glamorous celebrity is. Second, it relies on synthetic experience, that is vicarious rather than direct experience of another’s life. Third, it manifests mass attraction based upon a special allure made up of physical attraction, lack of self-consciousness, and a perceived indifference. Glamorous celebrity must be exercised effortlessly or not at all but, paradoxically, that effortlessness requires considerable effort. Fourth, it requires the ability to embody contradictory qualities simultaneously, thus producing an unresolved intensity: “Strength and vulnerability, innocence and experience, and singularity and typicality among them. The possessor of it keeps a precarious balance between such mutually exclusive alternatives, suspended like a tightrope dancer on one foot; and the empathetic tension of waiting for the fall makes for breathless spectatorial” (Roach 2007, 8).

What is important to understand about glamorous celebrity is that it revolves around persons who are also things. They are a “something.” They exist in the realm of mediated imagination, as stimuli promoting further exploration, stirring up the proverbial itch of urges, desires, and identifications that we can’t help but scratch. They therefore need to be “small” enough to provide intimate connections to personal memory and “large” enough to satisfy the imaginary hopes and desires and needs of a public whose members often possess contrary expectations and who are united only by their need to explore, according to the principle that “the most charismatic celebrities are the ones we can only imagine, even if we see them naked everywhere” (Roach 2007, 22).

We can, of course, see various ways in which it has been possible to guide imagination historically, nearly all of them stemming from the religious notion of the effigy. The effigy was a thing that stood as a synthesis of an idea, for example divine rule, with often only the vaguest of connections to the person—saint, martyr, king, or queen—concerned.

But it is not just the substance of personas that changes. They become surrounded by an object world that confirms this model but also has its own existence. Thus seventeenth-century theater also saw the beginnings of the construction of elaborate object worlds in which the props could have lives of their own as unstable temporal contracts that temporarily crossed the divide between inanimate object and animate subject (Sofer 2003). This tendency has only increased since the invention of screened communication, especially with the advent of digital communication, reaching the next stage (quite
literally) in the creation of worlds where celebrities are themselves accessories: “useless for all practical purposes but symbolically crucial to the social self-conceptions of their contemporaries” (Roach 2007, 55). In the celebrity worlds now being created, vicarious exploration of the affective fields of celebrity is a part of their captivation. More and more can be conveyed about these effigies through multiple layers of information that act to amplify interest and yearning, and to confirm or question certain self-conceptions.

The glamorous celebrity is neither person nor thing but something in between, an unobtainable reality, an imaginary friend, and an accessory, a mental image that can be conjured up in the imagination, explored, and made one’s own, something that is at issue in the world. A celebrity’s personality may contribute something to the celebrity’s look and feel but so do a vast range of colorful materials, many of which exist on the boundary between alive and inert—clothes, jewelry, hair, skin, flesh all have their part to play. These colorful materials are a vital part of what glamorous celebrity is, lively fabrications that are telling in every sense; “what we at least think we see in the charming person is a certain total geography of objects, one that the charming agent acknowledges and inhabits to the exclusion of others” (Harman 2005, 138). Clearly, it is not possible to enumerate every one of the colorful materials that helps to make up these total geographies in a short essay like this one, so let me choose just one—hair. Hair occupies a borderline on the body, quite literally. It is the easiest part of the body to alter, it grows, and so must be cut. It can be curled, shaved, dyed, straightened, and greased. It changes color over the lifetime. “There is no longer such a thing as a ‘natural’ hairstyle. But was there ever?” (Cox 1999, 269).

Famously, Hillary Clinton’s address to Yale University’s graduating class of 2001 included the following bittersweet remarks:

The most important thing I have to say today is that hair matters. This is a life lesson my family did not teach me, Wellesley and Yale failed to instill in me: the importance of your hair. Your hair will send very important messages to those around you. It will tell people who you are and what you stand for. What hopes and dreams you have for the world . . . and especially what hopes and dreams you have for your hair. Likewise your shoes. But really, more your hair. So, to sum up. Pay attention to your hair. Because everyone else will. (2001)

These remarks could be interpreted in all kinds of ways. As a feminist howl of anguish. As a condemnation of the superficial nature of modern
politics and, indeed, of society as a whole. As the lesson that looks really do matter. As a further illustration of the fact that it is possible to be undone by your hair. But I want to approach them in a slightly different way: as a means of approaching the subject of celebrity. For Hillary Clinton found that “hair can exert a magical power even greater than that of accessories and clothes, in part because it functions as both simultaneously [and in part because] hair belongs (or appears to belong) to the body of the person who wears it” (Roach 2007, 117). Hair, in other words, as a synthesis of aesthetic object and a means of stoking public intimacy, can be charismatic (McCracken 1996).

Hair has a neglected history that is only just starting to be explored in detail. Yet hair has become a crucial moment in generating glamour, based in part on new technologies that allow hair to become more and more aesthetically expressive. Generally, hair has been subject to major technological shifts. For a long time the major hair technology was the wig. There is, of course, the long and involved history of the wig, which has now transmuted into the widespread use of many false forms of hair. But since the end of the nineteenth century, technologies have grown up that make it possible to do wig-like things with growing hair. To begin, hair can be colored. So, for example, although hydrogen peroxide was invented in 1818 it was nearly a century later that it started to be used for cosmetic purposes when the first commercial range of hair dyes was made available by L’Oréal in 1909 (Cox 1999). Initially, hair coloring was looked down on. Now, it is estimated that almost half of all women color their hair (Cox and Widdows 2005). Similarly, hair now has the capacity to be curled or straightened in ways that were not available historically. For example, producing permanent curls dates from the Marcel waves of fin de siècle Paris and from the invention of the permanent wave in 1909. Then, it is possible to cut hair in ways that before would have demanded a wig. Sometimes these inventions can interact: perming really took off in the 1930s when bob haircuts became fashionable. Finally, all manner of other hair technologies have become standard, from the hair dryer (which first arrived in 1920, although not becoming general until the 1950s) to shampoo (dating from the 1870s) and conditioner (invented at the end of the nineteenth century but first available in the modern form in the 1970s and 1980s).

Glamorous celebrity uses this technology to produce new surfaces that combine with other accessories to produce a particular look. Celebrities’ hairstyles can often be seen as inventions in their own right, artifacts of the close correlation of clothes and hair that dates from the 1960s. Hairstyles
have become a means of launching new celebrity faces and repositioning old ones, producing a signature that is a part of the glamorous celebrity sign system. In turn, that system can be explored by consumers. Thus “we try our best to ape [glamorous celebrities’] clothes and looks, and for many of us the easiest aspect to copy is their hair; taking on the cut of a star has a transformative power that sustains this feeling of identification long after the film or TV show has finished. Entering the salon with a photo of a star ripped from the pages of a glossy magazine is a rite of passage for many teenagers and has been ever since the existence of the star system in Hollywood” (Cox and Widdows 2005, 113–14).

Conclusions

In one sense, what I have outlined could be seen as another episode in what Sheldon Wolin (2008) called capitalist totalitarianism, recalling Arendt’s definition of the driving force of totalitarianism as put forward in her book The Origins of Totalitarianism: “The aggressiveness of totalitarianism springs not from the lust for power . . . nor for profit, but only for ideological reasons: to make the world consistent, to prove that its respective supersense is right” (1958a, 458). But that would, I think, be to give that supersense too much force.

Equally, accounts of “ontological domination” (Lash and Lury 2007) seem to me to be too strong. It is surely the case that the new forms of capitalism may often seem all-encompassing. But the system cannot work unless there are loopholes through which the new and quirky can make their way. It may be that capitalism can use the power of aesthetics and the momentum provided by the consequential urge to explore in its favor, but that can only be with the accompanying risk that the exploration will move into hostile territory.

As importantly, this kind of account ignores the wealth of empirical research on consumers that shows that though there may be many who are attracted by glamour just as many use consumption as an integral part of gift giving and of sharing. Then again, many consumers do make attempts to link their consumption to ethical imperatives, sometimes half-heartedly, sometimes mistakenly, but certainly showing more than a slavish devotion to consuming for its own sake. It would be possible to see these kinds of practices as minor or subordinate but they have had sometimes considerable effects, ever since the original consumer boycott of sugar as part of the
campaign against slavery in the eighteenth century (see also Trentmann 2007). Not everyone is taken in by the secular magic of glamour and other forms of allure, but sometimes even the most hardened feel its tug—in an impulse purchase, in some small sign of obeisance to a persona they can’t help but fantasize about, in an object placed just so in a room.

So perhaps a better way of understanding consumer capitalism might be as part of a series of overlapping affective fields. Perhaps one of the most powerful means of setting up counterpractices might be to aesthetically modulate these fields. For example, Bellk (2007) argues that sharing is a culturally learned behavior that can be disseminated in all kinds of ways and that with the rise of intangible goods like information, images, and ideas it ought to be possible to promote sharing on a much wider basis than currently, especially through the design of aesthetically pleasing objects that are predicated on precisely this kind of activity. Such goods can, of course, have their own allure. The challenge is to build that sort of charm, knowing that it can and must be done.2

Notes

I would like to thank Greg Seigworth for his comments on this essay, which is an extended and revised version of a paper forthcoming in the *Journal of Cultural Economy*.

1 The Left has always regarded this kind of magical pleasure as a fraud and a trap. That is not helpful. Such an attitude, located somewhere between complex forms of suspicion and simple snobbishness, makes it impossible to understand why this magic has a grip on people’s lives and both overestimates and underestimates capitalism’s magical powers. As Stengers puts it, “Is it not the case also that conveniently escaping a confrontation with the messy world of practices through clean conceptual dilemmas or eliminativist judgements has left us with a theatre of concepts the power of which, for retroactive understanding, is matched only by their powerlessness to transform? Naming sorcery as the power of what has been able to profit from any assurance our convenient simplifications entailed means that we may have something to learn from those practices we have eliminated as superstitious, the practices of those for whom sorcery and protection against sorcery are matters of serious practical concern. I do not claim we should mimic those practices, but maybe we should allow ourselves to ‘see’ them, and wonder” (2007, 15).

2 And it is. Think only of the way in which many artists today are intent on unsettling accepted aesthetic formations in projects that are political, analytical, and constructive all at once and the same time.