CHAPTER 4

Can Plastics Be a Muse for Future Feminist Innovation?

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I have a fashion label called House of Flora and make hats and accessories that sell worldwide to stores and galleries. I studied Fashion Design at the Royal College of Art, and was known by my peers as 'Plastic Fantastic', and am now head of its Footwear Accessories Millinery and Eyewear (FAME) specialism. Plastics inspire me as a materials group because of the infinite possibilities of form that they can create, re-position, and mass produce as art objects or wearables. I see plastics as a malleable force for moulding the infinite possibilities of my imagination to propose a cool synthetic future aesthetic for warrior-like women.

Deborah Jaffé has written on the practical influence plastics have had on the emancipation of women over the past 150 years. For example, she introduces the idea that the bicycle, and specifically the Dunlop rubber tyre that allowed them to become popular, was one of the first ways in which women were liberated to travel alone, with privacy. Once women were free to travel without chaperones, no one had to know where to or

why a woman was travelling, and this freedom greatly advanced the fight for women's freedom and self-actualisation (Jaffe 2009). By contrast, my subject is, rather, how through the agency of plastics women can be empowered and transformed.

Catwoman, particularly Michelle Pfeiffer's rendering in *Batman Returns*,[1] which I will come back to, is the cornerstone of my conception of plastics as an empowering and transformative materials group. My case is that plastics have not only the power to transform women but also to enable them to find their own, individual routes to power and self-actualisation, and thus to be a muse for future feminist innovation. This chapter explores this emancipatory role of plastics by referencing art, films and theories as well as my own practice and my archive of hats and accessories. It also draws on interviews with individuals who employ plastics not just as a tool or a vehicle of self-expression (as I do), but further, have and continue to ingrain it into their very personhood, using plastics not only to augment their physical selves but as Catwoman does, to define for themselves a new mode of being.

Plastics, a Material of Rebellion

I originally studied fashion. This was, however, an accident. I could not decide where to specialise, and fashion was just one of my interests. I feel privileged to come from a family of architects, conceptual thinkers, fine artists, and textile designers, and therefore my work has been heavily influenced by a wide spectrum of colours, ideas and theories. During my foundation year at art school, I was put in the textile and fashion workshops but felt far more at home in the spatial design and sculpture workshops. Now I am what is technically termed a 'milliner', specialising in making hats for fashion, but prefer to be called a fashion designer who makes products.

In the early 1990s, I designed a beret dip-moulded in PVC, titled at that time as the Jelly Beret, which continues to be made today, over 20 years later, in multiples in a UK factory, the main business of which is manufacturing plungers and medical equipment. My passion for accessories is based on my belief that it is the details, which are the point in fashion. The early marketing of this particular hat was a portrait in the style of Che Guevara whose revolutionary image became a symbol of rebellion for global culture (Fig. 4.1).

Fig. 4.1 Che Guevara-style marketing image for the *Jelly Beret*. Photobooth 1999. (Photo: Flora McLean)

The beret provides an example of rebellion through fashion: wearing any hat is provocative, but wearing a smooth, futuristic hat made of plastics takes it to another level entirely.

Most fashion designers would not associate plastics materials with their métier other than as materials for linings, undergarments and lingerie or as substitutes for more expensive 'natural' materials. Nonetheless, they have been used in a number of forms: polyvinyl chloride (PVC) for rain macs, acetate for eyewear, moulded resins and acrylics for jewellery, thermoplastic supports for costumes and hats, synthetic rubberised coatings for weather-resistance and inflatable wearables for fun, safety and art pieces. A striking pioneer of innovative use of plastics in fashion was Elsa Schiaparelli. In 1934, she made what was described as a 'glass' cape from Rhodophane, a transparent plastics related to cellophane (Curtis 2014, 56) and is renowned for making a feature of cellulose acetate zippers as well as for her 'Lucite' jewellery, Lucite being a trademark for a type of acrylic. In 1938, the designer Elizabeth Hawes in her book *Fashion as Spinach* put forward the concept of pouring substances into moulds to solidify into a finished garment, one way of working with plastics (Hawes 1938, 289); and 'the impact of the revolutionary nylon, described as coal into silk, was claimed by one newspaper as 'more revolutionary than Martian attack'' (Curtis 2014, 56). Post–World War II Mary Quant capitalised on the 1960s' love affair with new materials and was the first designer to use

PVC, creating 'wet look' clothes and different styles of weather-proof boots in her footwear range, Quant Afoot (Quant 2012, 112, 120–121).

Fiorucci was a shop I used to visit as a child and teenager; an edgy 'cool' store, with fashion for young people, including accessories, which made plastics desirable, wearable and fashionable. The range of items for sale were displayed in an arty, music-filled space that felt more like a playground or an art installation than a run-of-the-mill retail spot. As Eve Babitz wrote: 'Fiorucci thrives on its perversion of form, its refusal to do things the way everybody else does them. They don't use silk everyone else does […] In 1979, some of the Fiorucci jeans turned transparent; they were produced in see-through plastic […] cheerful, playful galoshes in fanciful colours so happy that your mood would improve the instant you looked down' (Babitz 1980). To me it felt like a sweet shop, and exerted a huge influence over my ideas.

Another formative influence was a visit to the Anthony D'Offay Gallery where I saw a plastics installation by Tony Cragg, created from collected, collated, and categorised found everyday plastics objects. The unifying feature was that everything was orange. I remember looking at these objects: some things I had as toys or they were household objects and seemed so familiar, but they had been given a special place carefully curated on a gallery floor. Recently, Cragg recalled this aspect of his work: 'at that period sculpture was … about finding new materials, I was interested in manmade materials … plastic things just seemed obvious … they were around … sometimes a plastic object looked like it was from another planet, it looked something very beautiful' (cited in San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2019). Seeing plastics placed in such a setting contributed to my belief in plastics as a 'special' or higher material. The fact that they were orange may also have influenced my fascination with this colour.

As a student, I began collecting orange kitchen utensils made of plastics and began hoarding them. I still search for things at car boot sales and more recently online. I love this colour. It is described by the Pantone Colour Institute as: 'From sweet smelling peach and energizing coral to vibrant tangerine, spicy ginger and earthy terra cotta the meaning of orange is inexorably linked to the sensations of radiant energy, heat and the glowing presence of the setting sun' (Pressman 2017). For me it represents spontaneity, motivation, positivity and the future (Frieze 2000) but the utensils have to be made of plastics. The reason for this is that, as I perceive the material, it represents a space age, that is, an age in the future as, for example, underpinned inspiration in the 1960s product and

furniture styling revolution. Now I actually use all of these pieces at home. Although this use of plastics is not necessarily fashion wear, my 'orange kitchen', full of my collected items, has become part of my identity, my aesthetic, almost as much as my wardrobe. Perhaps I was trying to recreate the sweet-shop-feeling of the Fiorucci shop, to have my own candy shop in my kitchen, or my experience of the Cragg installation, and that, in a way, is what fashion does too. Fashion helps you capture a feeling, a moment, a memory, which can be physically distilled upon your body (Fig. 4.2).

This use of plastics as a means of designing my home aesthetic supports the view that plastics can help form self-image and contribute to personal identity.

When I studied fashion in the early 1990s, most students were concerned with cloth and the properties of textiles. Due, in part, to my lack of skills in this area (an inability to stitch and sew straight and accurately), I had no choice but to use other materials as a counter-act as I sought other ways to build form on the body. I was often to be found in 3D workshops where I was exposed both to new materials and alternative methods of construction and production (normally reserved for product design). I already saw plastics as the material of current relevance: a clean, smooth, space-related futuristic material and a counterpoint to the more traditional materials like fabric or leather; even as a rebellion against them. Polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA), better known in the United Kingdom by its trade name, Perspex and frequently called acrylic, was often my initial starting point. I also used PVC, neoprene, and latex, as well as found plastics sourced from recycling bins and offcuts. Using hard plastics and bonded synthetic fabrics, which do not require hemming or linings, I could cut raw shapes to add structure to or drape on the body. It was a practice that encouraged both new approaches and new outcomes.

Plastics are now my chosen material. This choice represents a rejection of traditional materials and techniques in millinery practice such as natural structures, like straw, felt, sinamay, and domette. To me, these materials represent a stereotypically 'occasion-wear, dusty, haberdashery' aesthetic from which I attempt to depart as a designer, in search of 'the new'. I use techniques such as pouring resin, as suggested by Elizabeth Hawes, cutting acrylic, dip-moulding PVC and 'sonic-welding' of inflatable structures, creating my personalised design language that aids the development of my unique visual aesthetic. In my studies, I worked with Nick Crosbie of Inflate, a consultancy that specialises in inflatable structures marketed as

Fig. 4.2 Author's orange plastics' kitchen, 2017. (Photo: Flora McLean)

'made in the future' (Inflate n.d.). As stated by McLean and Silver, 'The inflated elements variously gave structure to a coat collar, hat brim or the hoop of a skirt'. As architects, it is their opinion that 'The inventiveness of fashion designers in the use and development of new materials and fabricating processes, coupled with the fast turnaround of the fashion calendar, provides a great incubator of ideas that more architects would do well to embrace' (McLean and Silver 2015, 144–145). The resulting silhouettes were seen as 'different' in the fashion studio and a rejection of the more standard materials and production methods for making garments and/or accessories. Rebellion is at the heart of my practice and has a huge role to play within feminist revolution and innovation. This rejection and rebellion and going against the grain of traditional fashion practice are now what I am known for in the industry. I believe this rebellion can start before a garment has even been designed. Rebellion can be in your choice of material and my choice is frequently plastics in one form or another.

You need to be fearless in order to come up with new ideas. In the words of Mary Quant: 'The breaking of traditional rules is always exciting. Rules are made to be broken. When you break a rule you automatically arrive at something different' (Quant 2012, 137). Much of the work that I do and the way that I think are seen as controversial and cavalier. With activists participating in the global movement, Extinction Rebellion, all around me, working with plastics is part of the controversy of my work and design practice. Part of the rebellious character of plastics for me is their anti-naturalistic reputation and it is, I believe, this status as modern, anti-traditional materials that gives them the agency as transformative materials. The paradox of this reputation is the alternative view of plastics as harmful materials; related to this is the misconception that plastics are not made from 'natural materials', and as such are not perceived in the same way as woods, metals and glass. This is a subject that is returned to in Chap. 13.

The rebellious case that plastics are actually natural materials has been cogently made by the conceptual artist, Neil Cummings, who, for a while, washed and put on a shelf an example of every plastic bottle that passed through his house:

> Plastics are lodged in our consumer consciousness as completely synthetic, when in fact the materials are derived—as with everything else in our material culture—from natural sources, principally oil, natural gas, cola and salt. The origin of this confusion, and the reason we can identify a radical shift in

> the history of technology is the depth of our technological intervention. As the material Bakelite and its derivatives multiplied, a German organic chemist Herman Staudinger invented a group of both natural and synthetic substances we now refer to as polymers. (Cummings 2004, 323)

Nevertheless, plastics have a tendency to be perceived as the Frankenstein of materials just because of 'the depth of our technological intervention' in that they are chemically created rather than mined or sourced directly from the earth. However, even now, when the environmental ethical implications of using plastics are very much to the fore, many of my students are trying to make their own plastics using 'natural' materials such as algae and sweet potatoes, a testimony to the value of plastics as a material in design. Their aim is to create a material that looks just like our established image of plastics: shiny and new, and to perform in the same way, except that they are looking for materials that biodegrade at a low heat and have thus low or even nil environmental impact. One student, Søs Hejselbæk, is 3D-printing modular units through an algorithm based on the flow of rivers that click together to resemble female forms. I believe the amazing variety of ways in which plastics can be conjured up combined with their infinite versatility: their textures, hues, weights and the forms they can make, imbues them with magic. In the words of the much quoted, with reference to plastics, Roland Barthes, 'in essence, the stuff of alchemy' (Barthes 2000, 97).

Feminist Innovation through Plastics

I was always influenced by my mother's style. She is more Mary Quant's era. She and I would pore over *Vogue*, trying to find a way to recreate the Claude Montana[2] plastics macs we saw on the pages with the materials we had to hand. I remember walking with my mother on the King's Road, when we noticed a glossy electric blue coat in a window. I now know it was designed by Antony Price, best known for his work for performers like the Rolling Stones, David Bowie, Duran Duran, and especially Roxy Music, and admired for his intricate and detailed structures. In the words of the journalist Chrissy Iley, 'What I have always found interesting about Price's work is the way his cut can feminise men and yet make them look more masculine. And his tailoring for women can be so masculine it's feminine' (Iley 2008). When my mother tried it on, the construction of the coat transformed her figure. The in-built corsetry gave her a sculpted shape I

have never forgotten. It impressed on me fashion's potential to change how people are perceived.

I have an alter ego as a disc jockey. When I perform, I play only vinyl, always wearing a hat made of plastics. In this respect, I am influenced by Miss Poly Styrene, the punk singer from X-Ray Spex. She evoked a strong image of female rebellion, expressed through both her name and her clothes: in most images she is wearing a PVC dress and crash hat (unusual in the 1970s) (Poly Styrene—X Ray Spex n.d.). DJing is a practice dominated by men so when I DJ, I like to express my style via a hat and feel like I am controlling the room and the mood with the sound and image. The hat becomes my identity, a symbol of my rebellion and a contributor to my release from the patriarchal idyll. It also epitomises what I like about plastics: forms that are not what they look like, apparently hard but actually soft and vice versa, the trompe l'oeil effects and illusions that plastics can perform, something that is simultaneously unusual and familiar, a shiny beret in the shape of a breast misplaced on your head.

A more extreme example of empowering transformation is provided by a head piece designed by Maiko Takeda and worn by the Icelandic singer and songwriter Bjork on the cover of her 2015 album *Vulnicura* (Pitchfork n.d.). A radical, both sartorially and musically, the headpiece with its halo of candy-coloured translucent plastics spines, gives the singer a celestial radiance, as if she were a goddess from the distant future. This use of plastics is not utilitarian but atmospheric, creating form in suspended space, emitting light, and suggesting traces of movement around the wearer. The properties of plastics contribute their particular magic to the image. Is there any other material that could have achieved this so effectively?

Another fascinating persona fashioned in plastics is Pandemonia. She is a walking conceptual artwork invented in 2008 as a parody of celebrity by an anonymous London-based artist and has been vividly described by Katia Ganfield of *Vice* as 'Roy Lichtenstein's blonde caricatures … brought to life as a 7 ft Jeff Koons inflatable' (Ganfield 2011). The artwork is often seen at fashion shows in a latex head mask with stylised flowing hair, wearing shimmering latex dresses, sometimes accompanied by a white, inflatable polyurethane puppy (Fig. 4.3). I was fortunate enough to interview her (email to author 21 November 2017).

Question: 'Can plastics be a muse for future feminist innovation?'
Answer: 'Plastics, combined with imagination, have the Promethean quality to refashion one's form into anything one so desires.

Fig. 4.3 Pandemonia 2020. (Photo: Pandemonia)

We have the ability to re-invent the world. The question in my mind is what does one desire? Where do these ideas come from? The pursuit of beauty is not inextricably linked to health but often the opposite. Without realising it we are moving towards the things we are trying to get away from. "Perfection" is a manmade concept: it is alien. Plastics are the embodiment of that concept made real. The physical body has to yield to the rigidity of the idea. Plastics are hard

to wear and alien in the environment. Ideals are not found in nature. Prometheus took the flame of knowledge but ended up paying for it.'

Question: 'What does your image represent for the future of feminist innovation?'

Answer: 'Pandemonia's image demonstrates that we communicate through signs. Visually, femininity and masculinity are created out of tropes that can be worn and discarded at will. It shows we can have numerous identities and perform numerous roles. Maybe Pandemonia glimpses at an anarchic freedom where one is free of gender, conventions, society. Through performing, Pandemonia I have been able to travel the world, passing through the invisible walls that restrict us.'

Pandemonia's point about being able to float through restricting invisible walls is in tune with Donna Haraway's famous essay "Cyborg Manifesto". She uses the metaphor of the cyborg to urge feminists to move beyond the limitations of traditional binary gender roles (Haraway 1985). My designs in plastics support such an endeavour. The beret is worn alike by men and women and, as modelled by Agyness Deyn on the cover of a 2006 *Vogue Italia*, presents a gender redefining aesthetic of androgyny. Likewise, James Stopforth's image of a model wearing a yellow visor, taken against a backdrop of waste plastics, presents, in spite of the elegant clothes, a non-binary gender identity (Fig. 4.4).

Beth Buxton, who was instrumental in setting up the shoot, saw her as 'a strange almost AI "worker" in the plastic nightmare' (email to author 18 April 2020). The image was created for and was part of a collaborative exhibition showcasing Wain Ru's architectural concept of a new city borough built entirely from its own recycled plastics and Stopforth's interest in the parallel nature of the plastics world. The concept was to introduce 'a hyper-real part of our world but also a future that may be imminent' (Red Bull Studios 2014).

Plastics Armour

The feminist warrior can often be found in my garments and images. Sometimes they recall Pierre Cardin's outfits of the 1960s, which often suggest the power of plastics as a unifier. Cardin's models look like they are in uniform and their stance is almost alien, somewhat like a cyborg

Fig. 4.4 *Untitled*, 2014. (Photo: James Stopforth styled by Beth Buxton)

vision of a future female doll army. The outfits are also wipe-clean; nothing leaves a mark on this plasticised armour. This reverberates with my ideas about plastics' potential as a tool for the emancipation of women, moulding them into militant, powerful beings, capable of determining and fighting for their own destinies. Cardin's use of plastics is, however,

the antithesis of Pandemonia's. Her plastics-wear accentuates her shapeliness, giving her a supernatural silhouette; his outfits transform the wearers into a troupe or army, donning protective hats, gloves, and boots: hygienic, utilitarian and homogenous. Plastics are though at the heart of both aesthetics. Women can choose whichever better suits the identity they wish to project or the protective armour that most accords with their vision of themselves.

Pandemonia's adoption of a plastics persona demonstrates that we can decide who we want to be and how we want to be seen. A form of feminist rebellion is the autonomy to choose your own identity, to reject traditional feminine archetypes created for women and to choose, for yourself, the kind of aesthetic you want to embody. Plastics, as signified by Pandemonia, can enhance the physical manifestation of these rebellious pursuits.

An image that has been influential for me is from the iconic 1982 film *Blade Runner* when Zhora is defying physical boundaries by running through glass to escape Deckard, her strong feminine physique cutting a sharp angular dash through the glass, clad only in a plastics mac.[3] The visual suggestion is that Zhora's plasticised covering moves with her 'replicant' android (synthetic) 'body' through the glass as if the plastics provide a superhuman protective shield. The mac has become her armour. I often reference this aesthetic in my work. A striking example was the finale of my 1995 MA graduate show, with model Michelle Legare wearing a structured transparent mac and inflatable shoulder pads, reminiscent, also, of the black and white 1936 Alex Korda film *Things to Come* based on a story by H.G. Wells. Its materials were plastics sieve filter mesh and PVC with a halo made from a large hosepipe and fairy lights.

Plastics used as armour feature in multiple superhero movies but perhaps most notable and relevant is Tim Burton's 1993 film *Batman Returns*. Michelle Pfeiffer's downtrodden secretary constructs her own PVC cat suit, transitioning from dowdy assistant to an icon of feminine vengeance, Catwoman. This is reflected in how her body moves in the suit; her supple flexibility seems bestowed by the suit's elasticity; but more than this, the character has sewn into this suit the very rebellion she so desires in 'ordinary life' (Fig. 4.5).

In the transformative scene, Selena reaches into the back of her closet and selects a daring PVC black garment that is obviously seldom or never worn, and reimagines the stretchy PVC as a new skin; and in so doing, transforms her personality from anxious and timid to powerful, deadly and seductive. Caroline Evans has explored the association of the female body

Fig. 4.5 Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman in *Batman Returns*, 1989. (Photo: marka/eps©agefotostock)

with adaptability, as a kind of malleable plastics maquette that can be re-fashioned as a model for new attitudes and roles (Evans 2013, 215). I find the idea of women using plastics to re-fashion their own ideas of feminist uprising and of future generations of women being influenced by the technological advances plastics have brought into our consciousness especially inspiring.

Plastics can also play a more invasive role in refashioning, seduction, body armour and projecting a 'preferred image' as demonstrated by my friend and peer, Dora Szilagyi. She has what society calls a set of 'fake boobs', 'plastic tits', 'implants', 'enhanced breasts', 'breast augmentation'. This is her personal take on her ownership of her pair of 'fake, new boobs' (email to author 28 November 2017):

Question: 'How do you consider your new boobs? Are they an enhancement of your natural form? Or do you think they give you special power?'

Answer: 'They are definitely enhancements. I have always had big boobs and throughout my life, they disappeared. My body image is pretty unrealistic, so I [confess I have] never had an

objective view of my own shape or size. It was a lover who made me aware that my boobs are not as big as I thought. It was not even a question for me to surgically close that gap. They feel more "me" than before.'

Question: 'Do you refer to them as synthetic or plastic?'

Answer: 'Plastic. But mostly I refer to them as "fake".'

Question: 'How might you relate this enhancement to the male gaze? Does this come in to it? Did this enter your head when you were considering this decision? Or do you consider this action a purely personal choice?'

Answer: 'It is interesting because I have not had them done because of one particular person. However by nature most of my motivation comes from a sexual motivation—So, for example, I do sports and work out hard because I am attracted to athletic guys who are into athletic body-type girls. In that way I see the surgery being on the same level/in the same category as working out or eating clean or not smoking, drinking water, using sunscreen—I don't do any of that in particular for the 'male gaze', but all together contributing to the kind of woman that I would like to project to that male gaze. I am quite promiscuous and so the boobs have been, and are, one of my "super powers" in that respect. So far every man I have been with since the operation has been excited about them.'

Question: 'Plastics are controversial and they provoke strong opinions … do your boobs lead to similar reactions?'

Answer: 'I am very open and non-apologetic about it so, no. It is not often people confront me because my look (tattoos, piercings, strong glasses) is my personality. I also had a breast lift 10 years ago, a mini lipo-suction 7 years ago, implants and another lift 2 years ago. This year I'm planning a bigger lipo-suction for the areas that I can't shift with my workouts. Next things I am thinking eventually another breast lift, laser treatment for cellulitis, veneers and some minimally invasive facial treatments (non surgical). We live in a world where looks are most important, where single women are looked at as a social mishap and where narcissism is an accepted behaviour at any age. I am taking ownership of my body and all

> these “improvements” make me feel like an upgraded version of myself. I am not afraid or ashamed to be naked in front of anyone, in any lighting and at any angle because I know that I am making the most of what I have got.’

This is, obviously, an incredibly personal account of a woman and her relationship with her enhancements, and I am sure there are other women who do not have the same opinions of their surgery, their body image, or their supposed superpowers. I think what excites me about Dora is that it is so far removed from the relationship I have with my own body. There is a dichotomy between the male concept of the ‘plastic fantastic female’ (Kim Kardashian super-inflated curves) versus edgy, minimalist, boyish, intelligent beauty, which I prefer as a designer. But, whatever our preferred body image/shape, we do share similar coats of armour. We all have a coat of armour. We can all choose what our superpower is.

The controversy of plastics in surgery, botox and body augmentation, ties into my fascination with the world’s view of this magical substance. It can completely change someone’s natural body shape/function: it can enhance an element of your body you are not entirely confident of, or it can replace a missing limb, and that is surely brilliantly exciting? Plastics are a vehicle for both the creation of the mundane and the extraordinary, to quote Barthes again: ‘the mind does not cease from considering the original matter as an enigma. This is because the quick-change artistry of plastic is absolute: it can become buckets as well as jewels. Hence a perpetual amazement, the reverie of man at the sight of proliferating forms of matter …’ (Barthes 2000, 97).

Szilagyi’s answer in regard to the male gaze recalls the persona of the futuristic über-female Barbarella, the space-traveller and representative of the United Earth government in Roger Vadim’s 1968 film of the same name. Portrayed by Jane Fonda, her costumes were designed by futuristic fashion designer Paco Rabanne and included see-through corsets as a form of armour. This relates to the work I did with plastics fabricator and model maker, Kees van der Graaf, aka Mr Perspex, for the US lingerie company, Victoria’s Secrets. Van der Graaf (n.d.) is known especially for making torsos and body casts for Alexander McQueen. He also made a body cast of Kylie Minogue, contributing to her dramatic entry from an opening in the floor of the stage wearing a shiny metalised moulded fibre-glass suit of armour as part of her Fever Tour 2002. We were fortunate to be able to re-use it. Our brief was to make a black plastics trench coat that called to mind both Barbarella and Issey Myake’s 1980 breastplate as worn by

Fig. 4.6 Fibreglass trench coat designed by Flora McLean for Victoria's Secrets, 2008, Miami fashion show. (Photo: Matt Irwin for *Vogue* Russia)

Grace Jones (Heron-Langton 2020). The trench coat was to appear to be caught in the wind and the surface to appear shiny and wet. The sense of the piece as a protective breast plate was increased as the nipples proved unacceptable to TV in the United States and had to be sanded off (Fig. 4.6).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated a variety of ways, some private and some public, that plastics have moulded how people present themselves and thus how they are perceived. My own plastics aesthetic and embodiment of plastics as a muse and constant inspiration is proof that one's destiny, fate, and future can be determined, moulded and sculpted like plastics. Plastics will always be part of my conversation with the world. I am drawn to them as a materials group of artifice and synthetic chemistry. Plastics can be seen as a counterpoint to the idea of the 'natural woman', as a rebellion against oppressive female traits. Women are required to aspire to an impossible 'natural' archetype and embracing plastics is a way of rebelling against it. Plastics are celebrated for their plasticity, for their propensity for infinite change and shape shifting. They can be melted down and also reformed and articulated in many ways, and this appeals to the mercurial nature of many post-modern feminists.

Notes

1. Story by Daniel Waters and Sam Hamm, directed by Tim Burton, released 1992.
2. Claude Montana's House of Montana was founded in Paris in 1979 and ceased trading in 1997.
3. Story by Philip K. Dick, directed by Ridley Scott. Released 1982.

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