

## RISE AND FALL THROUGH MEDIA IMAGES: the Gabriela Pugliesi case

ASCENSÃO E QUEDA PELAS IMAGENS MIDIÁTICAS: o caso Gabriela Pugliesi

SUBIR Y CAER A TRAVÉS DE IMÁGENES DE MEDIOS: el caso de Gabriela Pugliesi

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### RESUMO:

This article seeks to investigate and reflect on how the scenario of images technically constructed and disseminated in digital media and the press operate in the construction of the narrative of digital influencer Gabriela Pugliesi. As such, we make use of the theoretical assumptions of Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, in dialogue with image and social science researchers. Boasting a specific standard of beauty, the fitness muse has profited from her tips on weight loss and altering body shape. The narrative we are seeking to investigate portrays a chapter we have called the "rise and fall through media images". Through attributes such as a defined body, glamour, charm and an intense social life, it has reached its culmination the same way it originated: through virtual/media images.

**KEYWORDS:** Media images; Gabriela Pugliesi; narrative; female beauty; body.

To take much pleasure in a world filled with  
many kinds of beauty is a joy in life  
to which all women are entitled.  
Clarissa Pinkola Estés

## Introduction

In the short story "The most beautiful woman in town", Charles Bukowski recounts a few days in the life of Cass, the main character who, according to the author, was the most beautiful woman in town, and the youngest and prettiest of five sisters. Bukowski portrayed Cass as "1/2 Indian with a supple and strange body, a snake-like and fiery body with eyes to go with it. Cass was fluid moving fire." (2007, p. 163). Bukowski's story is an insane journey into Cass's everyday life, in a time before the internet, after meeting her in a bar. A banal routine if it were not for the drinks and drugs, but without a now fundamental attribute: fame. There were no social networks for Cass to publicize her mischievousness; her adventures occurred in the sphere of private life or, at most, with those who observed her and enjoyed her company.

Meanwhile, in the introduction to the book "Morri para viver: meu submundo de drogas, fama e prostituição", journalist and writer Douglas Tavolaro describes the story of Andressa Urach as a storyline that seems to be written for cinema, "but it is the dramatic and real story of one of the most controversial media characters to have emerged in Brazil in recent decades" (URACH, 2015, p. 13). Unlike Bukowski's character Cass, the story of model and TV presenter Andressa Urach has gained worldwide repercussion through media images. Urach has become an impressive media phenomenon, Tavolaro reports, and episodes in her life have been in newspapers around the world. Her name has come to be one of the most searched for in the *Google* system.

The character whose narrative we intend to investigate and understand in this article also achieved fame through virtual/media images: the *fitness* muse Gabriela Pugliesi. Boasting a specific standard of beauty, the fitness muse has profited from her tips on weight loss and altering body shape. The narrative that is part of our *corpus* does not portray Pugliesi's entire life, but what we have called the "rise and fall through media images". This is relatively short period in her history, in which it is possible to go through images and texts intended to build a model of beauty, and personal and financial success. With more than 4 million followers on *Instagram*, episodes in Pugliesi's life have also been featured in major newspapers, TV shows, and mainly websites and social

networks. Pugliesi's rise and fall (at least momentarily in April 2020) occurs in the media world of fame, and allows us to understand the symbolic strength of images in constructing and deconstructing a character.

In this media-driven plot of diets and good shape in which Gabriela Pugliesi operates, we can highlight certain scenarios and protagonists (SANCHES, 2018). The first is the individual's interest in adapting to current body standards. The second, the celebrity industry, with its perfect bodies printed in magazines, advertising products of all kinds, websites and blogs, impose a certain body shape as the only possible model of beauty. There are a range of professionals who offer the necessary resources (and charge a premium for such), suggesting fad diets, slimming drugs and artificial manipulations that are "needed to squeeze and force ourselves into an unattainable norm of perfection that robs us of dignity, our cash and our health" (FOXCROFT, 2013, p. 21). Another central aspect is the virtual world (communication and information technologies), which can be accessed at any time and place, always with information about the latest news on diets, exercises, products, celebrities who have lost weight, and blogs sharing for information between subjects who intend to lose weight.

To analyze how the scenario of technically constructed images disseminated on digital media and in the press work in the construction of a character (that profits from such), we will mobilize the theoretical assumptions of Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, in dialogue with image and social science authors and researchers, such as François Soulages, David Le Breton, Giuseppe Mininni, Alan de Botton and Umberto Eco, as well as medicine and health researchers, such as Louise Foxcroft and Sophie Deram.

### **The performative image of the body: production of identity models**

As a significant materiality, media images are fundamental to understanding the discursive process of the body, both male and female. And, as we will be addressed below, the image of Pugliesi's sculpted body, as well as that of many celebrities working with appearance, is an extremely lucrative financial asset. To consider the relationship between body and image, we can begin with three reflections. The first, postulated by Persichetti (2018), emphasizes that our society presents itself, in an almost mantric manner, as hegemonically visual. Despite presenting itself as narcissistic, "it actually echoes social representations, image constructions without the proper decoding devices and, consequently, critical capacity or reflection" (PERSICHETTI, 2018, p. 33).

The second, postulated by Gregolin (2007), maintains that technical sophistication, such as that employed in the construction of the image of a perfect body, produces a veritable identity saturation, and this occurs mainly due to the incessant circulation of images that aim to generalize the models. "The profusion of these images acts as a device for labeling and disciplining the social body" (GREGOLIN, 2007, p. 18-19). Anchored in Gregolin's reflection, the third conjecture, proposed by François Soulages (2017), falls on the circulation of digital images, a fact referred to by the researcher as "the third moment of the image" (we will address this topic later).

In view of these reflections, we can point to some discursive readings about images. First, images such as those that appear in Gabriela Pugliesi's narrative interest us due to their symbolic effectiveness. Like any significant materiality, the image is also not transparent, it is materiality; therefore, its mode of operation is open to interpretation. The image has a history, an archaeology, and its *raison d'être* lies not only in the image itself, but also in the historical and sociocultural environment. Faced with interpretation, we cannot confine ourselves to the image as something legible and transparent, but we must investigate it in its complexity, trying to understand the various discourses that permeate and constitute it.

The iconography of the bodies of *fitness* muses like Gabriela Pugliesi should not be understood only in the transparency of the images, but in the discursive game in which they are inserted. In our society, "the image has become as or more relevant than the content taking hold of the social imagination" (CIOCCARI, PERSICHETTI, 2018, p. 113). Therefore, the image is discourse. As discourse, the image should not be treated as a concrete "thing", but as an object of the imaginary order, and the antinomy between visible and invisible and its ideological implications" (VARGAS et al, 2011, p. 48).

The incessant circulation of images technically produced by the various media apparatus is not innocuous to the contemporary subject. Images operate discursively producing identity models (as proposed by Gabriela Pugliesi), arousing feelings, desires and motivations, acting directly in the identification processes and in the construction of subjectivities.

### **The image of beauty of/for consumption: the thinness of the hyper-modern narcissistic body**

The character and stories built in the media by Gabriele Pugliesi gain strength by "materializing certain archetypes of a society's culture" (MININNI, 2008, p. 64). The model

or standard that can be reproduced by followers on social networks passes first of all through the shape of the body, notably the archetype of the perfectly thin body. The discourse of diets and good shape promoted by Pugliesi and so many other celebrities and *fitness* muses challenges the subject to lose weight with the newest diet, to consume fashionable food, and to engage in the exercise of celebrities.

**Figure 1:** The *fitness* muse Gabriela Pugliesi



Available at: <https://gshow.globo.com/programas/so-toca-top/noticia/gabriela-pugliesi-abre-o-jogo-sobre-compulsao-alimentar-forca-de-vontade-e-e-sua-relacao-com-comida.ghtml>.

Accessed on: May 15, 2020.

The body is currently seen as a product. A product of oneself, which resonates the senses (of oneself and for others); senses about "being in the world" with one's body. The result of a socio-cultural and historical construction, it is a physical and symbolic, imaginary dwelling. And a beautiful body is one that presents certain characteristics, archetypes that are accepted and naturalized in a certain age and culture. As Eco points

out, beauty "has never been absolute and immutable but has taken on different aspects depending on the historical period and the country" (2017, p. 14).

In a first aspect, the current body in contemporary society has certain specific traits, one of which overshadows them all: thinness. And the shape of a lean body is constantly praised by the media. Behind the scenes of a popular TV show, Gabriela Pugliesi was interviewed for the news portal belonging to the same broadcaster. The reporter says:

With a beautiful height of 1.70 meters and weighing a little over 50 kilos, fitness muse Gabriela Pugliesi jumps rope, rebounds, trains her abs, lifts weights, surfs, runs, cycles, prepares healthy smoothies, posts photos of whole foods and shows off her beauty online to her almost three million followers. However, Gabriela has experienced a few years of battling with the mirror. 'I was a very chubby, greedy, sedentary teenager. I didn't like to do anything', the muse revealed backstage on the Domingão do Faustão show (NUNES, 2016, s/p).

In more than one place, the text reinforces the transformation of her body since adolescence:

Now aged 31, this beauty hardly resembles the chubby teenager she was at 12. Her body's transformation is even more impressive when we see Pugliesi at 26, still lacking the super-defined muscles that made her an internet celebrity (NUNES, 2016, s/p).

Subsequently, the text includes images of the celebrity, highlighting the chronology of changes to her figure: "see the chubby fitness muse at 12, lean at 26, and with a body defined at 30" (NUNES, 2016, s/p):

**Figure 2:** The bodily transformations of the digital influencer



Available at: <https://gshow.globo.com/Bastidores/noticia/gabriela-pugliesi-entrega-como-abandonou-o-corpo-adolescente-era-gordinha-gulosa-e-sedentaria.ghtml>. Accessed on: May 15, 2020.

It is impossible to deny the strength of the image (whether artistic, journalistic, advertising, virtual or printed) as a matrix creating symbolic, aesthetic and social values. Discursively, the image has been maintained in order to circulate certain meaningful effects on the world, making them appear natural and evident as if there were no other way to enunciate it. The set of images and texts naturalize the senses about female beauty, more precisely about the design of women's bodies today.

The image touches one of women's apprehensions nowadays: the fear of getting fat. Women considered overweight receive several unpleasant nicknames (Foxcroft, 2013). The narrative shows the character's ability to overcome: from "chubby" at the age of 12, she goes on to boast a "defined" body at the age of 30. Pejorative names directed particularly at women considered to be fat indicate that talking about body fat implies discursively touching a network with numerous strands of tension, the effects of which involve violence, intolerance, humiliation, irony, derision, and repulsion.

There is a striking difference between the conditions of existence of ordinary women and celebrities, who have financial resources and a whole structure to improve the image of their bodies. Pugliesi's images set a remarkable example of a bodily model. They reiterate the celebrity's extremely thin body. The face, hands and legs are lean. This iconographic repetition, in addition to reinforcing the senses of her perfect body, emanates effects of joy, wellbeing, and happiness. The effects resulting from slimming point to a happy and fully realized woman.

The ability of images to manipulate the symbolic, build identities and influence subjectivities, and to arouse desires and attitudes to and from consumption is undeniable. In our time, says Gregolin (2007, p. 24), "the media is a powerful and inexhaustible source of production and reproduction of subjectivities, evidencing its sophisticated insertion into the network of discourses that shape the history of the present." The special *status* of *fitness* muse attributed to Pugliesi mainly has an effect on young people, acting "always with greater force among the aspirational goals of youth identity" (MININNI, 2008, p. 64). "It is idolatry, especially with young girls. I swear that at no time did I imagine that this would ever happen to me", says Pugliesi (BERGAMO, 2015, s/p).

One of the dissonant voices on the issue of fad diets is that of nutritionist and researcher Sophie Deram. In her work *O peso das dietas: emagrece de forma sustentável dizer não às dietas* (2014), Deram argues that the current beauty criteria are very different from those of the past, when a fuller body (especially that of women) was synonymous with beauty, health and strength, and also a sign that the woman could bear healthy children. "Now, thinness is increasingly valued", Deram indicates (2014, p. 54). The body of the subject of our time must be thin.

And the individual must make every effort to shape their body to the prevailing standard of thinness and, therefore, beauty. This is where figures like Gabriela Pugliesi operate discursively, providing a manual for slimming and shaping body design. For Lipovetsky, the despotism of fashion, formerly centered on clothing, is now attached to the body:

As the *diktats* of how to dress weaken, the power of the norms of the aesthetic, lean and young body are strengthened. The fact should be underlined: the less homogeneous clothing fashion becomes, the more thinness is imposed as a consensual norm that appeals to difficult practices and consumption (diets, slimming treatments, and cosmetic surgery). Never have our choices regarding personal appearance been so great, never has the body been so subjected to a homogeneous and



injunctive norm at all times of life (LIPOVETSKY and SERROY, 2015, p. 367).

As the construction and perception of body image is part of a continuous process, both image and body are constantly changing conceptions. In her archaeology of diets, Foxcroft reveals that the social and ideological formation in which we are currently immersed (of extremely thin female bodies) began in the 1920s, when hordes of single women, with their lives and future expectations modified by war, provided great profits for the diet business. The explosion of magazines and websites (such as the American celebrity site tmz.com) and bloggers like Pugliesi has made the ideal woman smaller, thinner, and sicker (Foxcroft, 2013).

Therefore, if a subject's body is impermanent to both themselves and others, both biologically and subjectively, it is not possible to think of it only as a set of muscle, skin and bones. The body cannot be investigated only in its biological dimension, but also symbolic - in how it is represented in a sociohistorical context. The representation that the subject has of their own body and the body of the other is affected, among other factors, by continuously exercising the act of seeing and being seen.

### "I know I sell": the rise of fame through images

Gabriela Leda Ferreira, known as Gabriela Pugliesi, was born in Salvador, Bahia on October 28, 1985. In 2013, she became exclusively dedicated to her blog, "Tips4life". Starting a slimming process as a teenager, she began posting photos on social media such as Instagram:

Walking for an increasingly healthy lifestyle, Gabriela Pugliesi began publishing photos on Instagram showing her transformation. The measure, she said, was to motivate herself with the results. However, her remarkable transformation ended up inspiring people from all over the country. So, it was only a matter of time before her profile grew, reaching thousands of followers (PERILO, 2020, s/p).

As the cover of *Women's Health* magazine (issue no. 83), Pugliesi is the embodiment of the *subject-celebrity-fitness* form, so prevalent in our technology-virtual world. It's the subject form which, the more it appears, the more it sells. The publication describes Pugliesi, responsible for creating expressions such as "NoBigButts", "YesHotties", "NoLazyBones", "Yourbuttsaysthanks", "TightTushProject" (BERGAMO,

2015), as a "muse of healthy living" and "*top blogger*", among other adjectives. According to Pugliesi, it's responses of this type that made her "popular" in the virtual world. *Fitness* muses are prodigious in producing metaphors to encourage the subject that persists in achieving success in good form, whose apex is the perfect body, shaping their body to the ideal encouraged by the beauty industry.

The imaginary of current beauty is that of a body that does not have folds, that is smooth, lean, and has no marks, exactly as shown in the images posted by Gabriela Pugliesi. This ideal of contemporary beauty is what Umberto Eco, in his work *On Beauty* (2017), called the "beauty of the media" or even the "beauty of consumption", *from* and *for* consumption. These are effects of meaning attributed to beauty that we consider eclectic and aimed exclusively at consumption. Unlike the ideals of other times of humanity, where beauty had more or less specific traits, in the beauty of the media:

Visitors to an exhibition of avant-garde art who purchase an 'incomprehensible' sculpture, or those who take part in a '*happening*', are dressed and made up in accordance with the canons of fashion. They wear jeans or designer clothes, wear their hair or make-up according to the model of Beauty offered by glossy magazines, the cinema or television, in other words by the *mass media*. These people follow the ideals of Beauty as suggested by the world of commercial consumption, the very world that avant-garde artists have been battling against for over fifty years. (ECO, 2017, p. 418).

Replacing the avant-garde exhibition suggested by Eco with parties, events and TV appearances, Pugliesi lends her body to commercial aesthetics (to promote and encourage consumption), following the fashion precepts dictated by the fitness industry. And all this occurs through media images. We can draw a parallel between Umberto Eco's "beauty of consumption" and Lipovetsky and Serroy's "hypermodern aesthetic ethics", a mercantile aesthetic that:

Has absolutely no ambition to attain an absolute at odds with everyday life. It is an aesthetic of consumption and enjoyment: art that is no longer intended to communicate with invisible forces or elevate the soul through the ecstatic experience of the Absolute, but rather consummative, playful and emotional 'experiences' capable of entertainment, to provide ephemeral pleasures, to boost sales (2015, p. 34).

The combination of a specific standard of beauty coupled with the ability to attract followers has turned into a highly profitable business for Pugliesi:

On her blog, she provided food and exercise tips among other things related to the fitness world. It wasn't long before she won the title of fitness blogger. At that time, what started as a simple blog became a very lucrative business (PERILO, 2020, s/p).

According to data published by the press, it is estimated that Gabriela Pugliesi "charges up to BRL 8,000 per *post*. To attend VIP events, she earns BRL 15,000 (in São Paulo) per hour, which increases to BRL 18,000 if she has to travel to other cities" (COSTA, 2017, s/p).

In 2015, Gabriela Pugliesi said in an interview published in *Jornal Folha de S. Paulo*: "I know I sell" (BERGAMO, 2015). The phrase leads us to analyze the ability to convert images into profit, in a phenomenon that is based, in the case of digital influencers, on several pillars. However, we can point to two crucial aspects. The first is the fact that the human being possesses what Alain de Botton calls the "impulse to admire", an "important feature of our psyches" (BOTTON, 2015, p. 139):

The news introduces us to a parade of extraordinary men and women: people who can run faster than anyone else on earth, who know how to make us laugh, who have started revolutionary businesses, who can design succulent meals and whose faces are flawlessly beautiful. Their achievements, personalities and good looks excite us as few other things can. As a result, we often want to ask them how they did it, hear them talk about their childhoods, observe what they are wearing, find out whom they are in love with, peek inside their homes, follow them to the seaside and even accompany them across the road when they go out to buy groceries (BOTTON, 2015, p. 137).

The second aspect rests on the fact that the media is revealing and at the same time constructive of what Giuseppe Mininni calls the "*star system*" in "Cultural Psychology of the Media" (MININNI, 2008, p. 64). According to the author, as a social institution, communication systems feed the tendency to act through inclusion and exclusion. The most significant effect of this trend by the media, explains Mininni (2008), is to give rise to the stars of the show, a special *status* present in an increasingly specific range of new performances or types of professionals. Let's take the example of Gabriela Pugliesi. A graduate in Industrial Design, she gained fame in the virtual world with her blog and social media activities. In 2015, her Instagram had around 1 million followers. Five years later, before her Instagram was taken off the air (we will address this episode later), the number of followers was over 4 million.

With this virtual success, she gained the sponsorship of companies from different segments. In addition to being a digital influencer, Pugliesi is a partner in businesses such as a restaurant and *spinning* studio, and has launched clothing, jewelry and frozen food lines licensed with her name, as well as a book with lifestyle tips (BERGAMO, 2015).

### **The search for a better version of oneself: permanent sculptors of bodily appearance**

A report on Pugliesi exalts the blogger as someone who has constantly outdone herself in the search for an "ideal body". The journalist defines her as "#Anovapugli" ("#Thenewpugli") who day after day seeks an improved version of herself. The text also praises the results achieved by the blogger: "in one year, she changed her body (which was already beautiful and became scandalously defined) and reinforced her positive attitudes" (ACHÔA, 2015). Change in the sense of improving the shape, redesigning its curves, linking this re(signification) of the body to a similarly optimized state of mind. In the scope of consumer-oriented media beauty, everyone is in principle their own stylist: "in reality, we are in fact led to become permanent sculptors of our bodily appearance guided by one and the same aesthetic model" (Lipovetsky and SERROY, 2015, p. 368). In the media narrative of *fitness* muses like Pugliesi, the aesthetic model is that of a lean, defined body, with no trace of fat.

With information available in the virtual world about practically everything, the subject cannot afford not to obtain success – whether professional or personal (such as a perfect body). The keyword is overcoming:

Pugliesi enlisted a legion of followers on Instagram, giving food and exercise tips. She has no degree in nutrition or physical education, but her best credential is her sculpted body: she was a chubby teenager. A '*story of overcoming*' with enormous popular appeal (GOES, 2020, s/p, emphasis added).

That is the maxim of the diet and fitness market - success at all costs. "Today, appearance has become the most important thing in the world. [...] Everything focuses on appearance, or weight. As if the scale were the indicator of happiness, wellbeing or health and success" (Deram, 2014, p.56). Fat people are not well regarded in our society, and their traits are usually considered incompatible with the ideals of body-image imposed by *fitness* muses. Lack of care for the body, such as the inability to lose weight, is often related to sloppiness and lack of personal commitment.

By appearing on several magazine covers and being the focus of news in newspapers and websites, disseminating a "manual for the improvement of the body", Pugliesi is one of several media celebrities serving the beauty industry. The need to lose weight, linked to the ease of access to information about diets and good shape provided by the virtual world, in addition to the media exposure of celebrities such as Pugliesi, makes the subject imprisoned in what Foxcroft (2013, p. 21) has called "panic-diet mode", trying anything to lose weight, feeling the pressure on all sides and unhappiness inside. The overweight individual is, in short, overwhelmed by the avalanche of images of an unreal body, idealized and sold as something possible to be achieved. In this process of inscribing the body and the meaning of social life itself (Dias, 2012), there is no excuse for the subject not to reach the standards of excellence, success and self-realization. "Now, as the news attests with its constant stories of initiative, perseverance, toil and self-realization," says Botton, "there are theoretically no limits to what anyone can achieve" (2015, p. 148). In short, there is no excuse for a woman not to lose weight or achieve a perfectly defined body, such as the one boasted by Pugliesi.

### **The fall through media images: "Fuck life"**

"The media creates and destroys gods at a dizzying pace," says Mininni (2008, p. 65). If Pugliesi's rise, fame, and financial and business success occurred through media images, her character's decline occurred equally through images, especially virtual ones. One of the main characteristics of technically produced images is circulation, which erupts nowadays at a frantic pace:

What matters in digital photography, for me, is circulation. This means that we have reached a third moment of the image. There was a first moment with the still image of the photograph. A second moment with the moving image of cinema. And a third moment, now, with an image that circulates, an image that we could call futuristic, the image of speed, the fluid image (SOULAGES, 2017, s/p).

As the contemporary subject presents the "impulse to admire", as Botton (2015) rightly observed, captivated by the feat of appearing on top, the opposite comes with equal power or with an even more destructive fury. In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), a public health problem of gigantic proportions that has claimed the lives of thousands of people around the world and began in Brazil in February 2020, Gabriela Pugliesi played a leading role in some striking episodes. The main

recommendation of health agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) to prevent the spread of the virus is social isolation, a factor completely ignored by the influencer in images published on social networks. The influencer may have contracted the coronavirus at her sister Marcella Minelli's wedding on March 7 in Itacaré, Bahia. After testing positive for coronavirus, one of her posts on social media generated controversy and was later deleted. According to journalist Nina Lemos, the influencer said:

The epidemic is something invisible that has come and put everything in its place. Suddenly fuel prices are down, pollution's down, people now have time, so much time, that they don't even know what to do with it. Parents are with their children, in the family. Work is no longer a priority and leisure as well (...). In an instant we realize that we are all in the same boat, rich and poor, that the supermarket shelves are empty and the hospitals are full and that the money and health insurance, which the money paid for, is of no importance, because private hospitals were the first to close (LEMOS, 2020, s/p).

We are not judging Pugliesi's words from a moral or ethical point of view. The objective is to report the effects on the meaning of the media narrative constructed by the influencer herself through images and texts. A narrative initially based on an the image of overcoming subordinated to practices for losing weight and displaying a specific body design, through to an intense and agitated social life, and the ability to profit from the dissemination of her "*Pugliesi way of life*" (FRANÇA, 2020, s/p). In yet another chapter of the narrative involving her social life and the coronavirus pandemic, the controversy reached a point where it culminated in taking one of her main tools of exposure and profit off the air:

Watching more than ten of her advertisers break their contracts, Gabriela Pugliesi realized the size of the hole she had dug herself into. The influencer showed Brazil that her healthy life discourse has the consistency of a rotten whey protein mousse. On Saturday, 25, she hosted a party at her house for Mari Gonzalez, a friend who had just been eliminated from Big Brother Brasil. There were at least ten people at the event, almost all bloggers selling a gym-running-nature lifestyle – such as Mari Saad and Bárbara Brunca. Like everything she does, every detail was designed to produce content for her Instagram. Only this time, by breaking social isolation, the idea backfired. The most serious part was not the decoration of balloons, naturally, but saying the following sentence on the dance floor of her home: "fuck life", precisely at the height of the coronavirus pandemic in Brazil (BATISTA JR., 2020, s/p).

Due to controversy, searches for the name Gabriela Pugliesi on a virtual search engine jumped 4,550% and became one of the ten fastest growing terms the day after the party. The images of the party promoted by Pugliesi and her digital influencer friends quickly spread on social networks and were the subject of the news in several press outlets. By making the images available on Instagram, she was harshly criticized by followers, friends and celebrities in general, "and saw her source of income disappear", notes Batista Jr. (2020, s/p).

The image-speed (LIPOVETSKY AND SERROY, 2015), which allowed the media rise and increased the earnings of the digital influencer were linked to image display machines such as Instagram, ubiquitous systems in the virtual world. A few days after the controversial party, Pugliesi deactivated her Instagram account, the system through which she established a relationship with her audience and a whole virtual commerce by exposing images of her body doing exercises or participating in social events. Digital systems, says Lipovetsky and Serroy (2015), are aesthetic spaces where browsing and window-shopping gives way to electronic navigation.

#### **Final considerations: the media landscape of individualist-consumer-narcissist culture**

We shall now return to the three pillars of the image on which this work is based. The number of Pugliesi's followers on social networks shows the symbolic power of media images in echoing representations, image constructs that interfere in aspects such as bodily standards and senses of female beauty, as demonstrated by her media narrative. The image of her perfectly thin body, adjusted to an ideal of beauty that greatly values thinness, incorporates a discursive power through fast and repetitive circulation (the third moment of the image proposed by Soulages). As Gregolin (2017) rightly observed, it is a labeling device, capable of mobilizing thousands of subjects and interfering in social practices, such as the pursuit of weight loss and bodily alteration at any cost.

Nowadays, researchers such as Maria Fernanda Laus (2013) point out that the media (or media environment) may be primarily responsible for the propagation of an indicator of hyperphysical, and often unattainable, beauty, by establishing and disseminating ideals of physical form that emphasize extreme thinness in women. Linked to thinness, aspects such as eternal youth, the defined body, the path to success and happiness provided by weight loss are also listed.

But images of the defined bodies of *fitness* muses would not be able to boost aesthetic activism alone. Images currently circulating about good shape, diets, cosmetic surgeries and other body manipulation systems gain strength in an environment that concatenates social, cultural, economic, technological and media forces. A scenario consisting of an "activist and performative culture of beauty", a modern principle "favored by our individualist-consumer-narcissist culture, in which pleasing oneself and others and physically improving oneself have become legitimate attitudes and aspirations" (LIPOVETSKY AND SERROY, 2015, p. 353). It is these vestiges of the fitness media landscape that we have sought to investigate here.

By exposing her body on websites and social networks (and profiting from it), Gabriela Pugliesi can also be considered an advertisement-body. "Three years ago, she stole the scene on social media with her fitness profile" (Achôa, 2015, p. 50). In addition to the advertisement-body, the blogger is an evolution in the media escalation of bodies that act as media supports: she is an example of the project-body subject form (SANCHES, 2018). The project-body is more refined than an advertisement-body, it is something to be admired by the mere mortals on the other side of the screens of their electronic devices. The project-body is a body image idealized by the media that imposes itself on the subject's conditions of existence (in our corpus of analysis, especially on women), affecting the way the body signifies and is signified in different spaces of existence. It manifests itself mainly in the media world of fitness, and has gained exponential publicity with the advent of the virtual world.

Gabriela Pugliesi's body functions discursively as a supernatural beauty, a purpose that challenges all of us, especially those who feel pressured precisely for not presenting the beauty reference of our time. The model imposed by the project-body is dissonant from the trivial reality of the subject of our time.

The blogger became famous by publicizing the physical exercises and diets she practices on the internet, in addition to parties, trips, dinners, her love life, and physical activities. One of the main examples of the celebrity-fitness-subject form, Pugliesi operates under the axiom "the more it appears, the more it sells". The image of celebrities, and hence, of their bodies, is an extremely lucrative financial asset. Those who manage to lose weight and expose their "new shape" and their "washboard abs" also have a chance to become news or even a celebrity. This is where the first commandment of current life comes into play according to journalist and writer Roberto Saviano (2014): the more you communicate, the happier you are, the more you communicate, the more



you get out of life, the more you trade in feelings, the more you can sell, sell anything, more and more.

The same media system that boosted Pugliesi's image and made her a poster girl for various companies was the same one that decreed her downfall (at least momentarily). When she decided to circulate the images of a party held during the coronavirus pandemic, in which medical authorities advocated social distancing, she "ended with a toast where she yelled out, in front of the cameras, 'fuck life'" (GOES, 2020, s/p). The images of the perfect body succumbed, at least momentarily, to the imposition of reality. This episode does not mean that the digital influencer cannot return to the media scene. However, a chapter in the narrative constructed through the media using attributes such as a defined body, glamour, charm and an intense social life ended the same way it began: through virtual/media images.

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**RESUMO:**

O artigo busca investigar e refletir como o cenário das imagens tecnicamente construídas e difundidas nos meios digitais e na imprensa atuam na construção da narrativa da influenciadora digital Gabriela Pugliesi. Para tanto, mobilizamos os pressupostos teóricos de Gilles Lipovetsky e Jean Serroy, em interlocução com pesquisadores das imagens e das Ciências Sociais. Ostentando um padrão de beleza específico, a musa *fitness* tem lucrado com suas dicas para emagrecer e alterar o formato corporal. A narrativa que procuramos investigar retrata um capítulo que denominamos "ascensão e queda pelas imagens midiáticas". Através de atributos como um corpo-definido, *glamour*, charme e intensa vida social, culminou da mesma forma que despertou: pelas imagens virtuais/midiáticas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Imagens midiáticas; Gabriela Pugliesi; Narrativa; Beleza feminina; Corpo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Imágenes de medios; Gabriela Pugliesi; Narrativa; Belleza femenina; Cuerpo.

**RESUMEN:**

Este artículo busca investigar y reflexionar sobre cómo el escenario de las imágenes técnicamente construidas y difundidas en los medios digitales y la prensa operan en la construcción de la narrativa de la influencer digital Gabriela Pugliesi. Como tal, hacemos uso de los supuestos teóricos de Gilles Lipovetsky y Jean Serroy, en diálogo con investigadores de imagen y ciencias sociales. Con un estándar específico de belleza, la musa del fitness se ha beneficiado de sus consejos sobre la pérdida de peso y la alteración de la forma del cuerpo. La narrativa que estamos buscando investigar retrata un capítulo que hemos llamado "subir y bajar a través de las imágenes de los medios". A través de atributos como un cuerpo definido, *glamour*, encanto y una vida social intensa, ha alcanzado su culminación de la misma manera que se originó: a través de imágenes virtuales / de medios.