

# Research report, n°6.

Six-monthly publication – June 2006

## **Editorial**

If fashion is merely a question of newness, luxury, the creative industries, immaterial value, brands, then how can it be the subject of serious research? Its position in the academic realm is morally suspect for both institutions and academics : an object of desire, fashion deals in excess and “over the topness”, the consumption of the superfluous. This has led to an academic disaffection, only a minor quantity of research and theses and a limited number of academics and publications exist. In its own way the French – and doubtless world-wide –

panorama of research takes all of these reservations into account by concentrating on the more “serious” subject of textiles, especially in Asia, at the risk of ignoring the essential particularities of fashion, with its own marketing and culture. All this means, of course, that studying fashion means getting trying to get beyond the accepted clichés. The aim of this issue is to provide a historic and contemporary, essentially French, overview of the writings and scientific publications on fashion in the social sciences and management.

The IFM Research Center is supported by the Cercle Jean Goujon that brings together the patrons of the Institut Français de la Mode:

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# Fashion as a topic for academic research

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**File/  
Fashion as a topic  
for academic research**

As an object destined for use and consumption, collection and exhibition, fashion mobilises economic, technical, social and cultural conditions and actors, the comprehension of which is interpreted in its academic form through research and writing. This dossier aims to retrace the genealogy, the difficulties and the opportunities of academic research applied to clothing and fashion.

The French word for fashion “mode” appeared for the first time as a term for “a collective way of dressing” in 1482. The term is rooted in the Latin word *modus* (manner, measure), and the term “mode” from 1393 on came to mean manner, then “façon” which led to the English term fashion. Dressing “à la mode nouvelle” (in the new fashion) from 1549 became “être à la mode” (to be in fashion). The eras at which these different semantic shifts occurred are far from neutral and can be seen as key dates in the development of fashion in the modern sense of the term. Each time a new social situation (the appearance of new competitors), technological progress (transformation of materials, distribution of items) and economic developments (commercial trade, distribution structures) occurred, they provided fashion with the elements essential for its development. Thus, the social or economic change at the end of the middle ages was a turning point, as much as the industrial revolution or the post-war economic boom, all stages considered as turning points in the notion of fashion. The very idea of the fashion industry is superimposed on this change and “les modes” (fashions), an accepted term from 1692, to define the professions attached to the industry, became, in 1860, “la mode” with the double meaning it has today – i.e. “a collective and transient trend in clothing and manners” and all of the industries of the appearance. While the notion of fashion changed through time, the way it was regarded evolved in parallel: the first writings given over specifically to the subject appeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Humorous essays or serious pamphlets, fashion was considered as a means to understand the uses and customs of man. This

tradition included such works as *Le Courtisan à la mode* by Charles Sorel, *The Anatomy of abuses* by Philip Stubbes and *Les Caractères* by La Bruyère. This literary tradition came into its own at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of a “literature of human portraits”, that used clothing extensively, and always as a mechanical expression of the man (Balzac, Barbey d'Aureville, Mallarmé), linked to a beginning of theorising of its significance, introduced by Kant in his *Anthropology*, or by Carlyle in his *Sartor Resartus*, taking the laws of imitation as the dynamic of a stuttering society. In parallel, it was also in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the first reflections on the history of clothing appeared from historical painters and writers, analyses given over to the observation and dating of the appearance and evolution of dress habits (Leloir, Quicherat, Racinet). This approach then became a tradition in itself – that could be termed pre-ethnographic – of “curiosities” that, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries dealt with clothing, but in a more topographical rather than chronological manner (Just Amman, Cesare Vecellio). This historical method has resulted in a mass of precious documents that mean that most pieces can be dated and listed but it ignored the meaning behind the appearance, sticking to a simple social and geographical taxonomy and taking change in clothing habits to be the result of a change in taste with no other consequence. At the turn of the century, a second school of thought proposed a functional explanation for the appearance or translation of garments. This more anthropological approach dealt with the needs of the wearer as the determining element as to the constitution of the appearance (Flügel, Kroeber). In parallel as it is “difficult to sum up the garment as the sum of a number of individual instincts and needs simply multiplied on a group scale” (Barthes), an approach to fashion developed in sociology. Fashion from this angle became the perfect instrument for studying competition mechanisms and model propagation. Analysed as a trend for a symbolic expression of social prestige, fash-

ion gave rise to various theories on the spread of models (Spencer, Tarde, Simmel, Veblen), leading to the identification of a double process of imitation and distinction. "Fashion being the imitation of those who wish to distinguish themselves by those who do not wish to distinguish themselves, this means that it changes automatically" (Valéry). When taken from a sociological point of view, this conception develops the processes of spread of models, either within a pyramidal conception of society (socio-economic elite), or a transversal conception (cultural elite) that designates a population with alternative behaviour as fashion leaders (intellectuals, those on the edge, young people, etc.) (Burgelin). These three approaches – historical, sociological or functionalist (whether from ethnology or psycho-analysis) – combined, particularly after the war, in a number of more structural analyses that have the merit of placing the role of the garment in relation to the individual, social organisation and its thought systems. This line of research, explored notably by linguistics, enables us to explore the general law that underlie the evolution of a clothing system and as such to approach the garment no longer as just an object but as the representation of a value system. At the confluence of all of these opinions, fashion never tires of being observed, dissected, magnified or insulted. It still incites as much desire, and as such comes under the umbrella of morals and philosophy, either as a "pure question of vanity", or a destiny for "finished" societies. It is respected as much as it is condemned (Doesn't *La Contre Mode*, by Fitelieu, written in 1642 echo Ugo Volli's *Contro la Moda*, written in 1992?). While it is seen as "capricious, futile and elitist", it is also the "laboratory of the enchanter", according to Christian Dior, and "being forced to live by these crazy laws, the wise man is never the first to follow it... nor the last to keep it".

Bruno Remaury  
Lecturer at the IFM

Interview/  
Frédéric Monneyron  
Fashion as a subject for social sciences

Frédéric Monneyron is a university lecturer, he teaches general and comparative literature and the sociology of fashion at the Université de Perpignan-Via Domitia, and is also a visiting professor in a number of American and European universities and an expert for the European Commission in Brussels. His research covers the sociology of the collective unconscious and his subject is sexuality and the relations between the sexes, clothing and fashion, on the one hand; Europe, the idea of nation and the idea of race on the other. He is the author of fifteen essays that have been translated into a number of foreign languages the most recent of which are *Séduire, L'imaginaire de la séduction de Don Giovanni à Mick Jagger* (PUF, 1997, reprinted 2000), *La Nation aujourd'hui. Formes et mythes* (L'Harmattan, 2000), *La Frivolité essentielle. Du vêtement et de la mode* (PUF, 2001), *Mythes et littérature* (PUF, 2002, with Joël Thomas), *L'imaginaire racial* (L'Harmattan, 2004), *La Mode et ses enjeux* (Klincksieck, 2005), *L'Automobile. Un imaginaire contemporain* (Imago, 2006, with Joël Thomas), *La Sociologie de la mode* (PUF, 2006) et *Sociologie de l'imaginaire* (Colin, 2006, with P. Legros, J.-B. Renard and P. Tacussel).

Olivier Assouly: Does sociology's interest in fashion go back as far as the birth of sociology itself during the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

Frédéric Monneyron: To be honest, no. When sociology became a proper separate discipline at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had very little interest in fashion at the beginning, or clothes fashion in any case. So while Gabriel Tarde who is often considered to be one of the fathers of the discipline—which was until recently quite ignored—speaks about fashion and develops a sociology of fashion-imitation in one of his most well-known books *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890), the subject of his analysis was trends in general and he didn't give any particular attention to fashion, as in clothing. While Thorstein Veblen singled out fashion for particular attention in his *The Theory of the Leisure Class* at the end of the century, it was on the edge, despite everything, of the nascent discipline, as all of his work is written from the perspective of an economist. It was in fact, Georg Simmel who, during the same period, brought fashion into sociology with his essay about fashion in 1895. However, Simmel's work was not in line with the demonstrative pretensions being fought out between the positivist methods and basic Marxism of the different schools of sociology and as such remained largely ignored (it was translated into French much later).

O.A: How was fashion writing organised before it was taken over by the social sciences? Was it a mere literary digression?

F.M: Before fashion became a sociological subject quite obliquely and late in the game as we have just seen, it was mainly writers and journalists who, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were the main authors of writings that attempted to evaluate the essential characteristics of the social phenomenon that is fashion and to ask questions on its meaning and function. Their takes and views on fashion must not be underestimated. The reflections of Balzac, Barbey d'Aureville, Baudelaire or even Brummell himself on dandyism are interpretations of the social function of clothing. And the same authors, to whom we must add Carlyle, Gautier, Wilde, without even talking about the ephemeral existence of Mallarmé's *La*

dernière mode, also proposed a more general overview of fashion that made up for its lack of science with spontaneity and intuition. Quite often the future directions of the sociology of fashion were already present in the better writings. In addition, Carlyle's project, at the beginning, was a true philosophy, even sociology, of the garment, even if it was largely aborted and deviated from in his work: *Sartor Resartus*. We should also note that Balzac is sometimes considered to be a sociologist, at the very least a figurative sociologist, before his time, and quite rightly if we consider his *Traité de la vie élégante* in particular.

O.A: Why did fashion become a "scientific" subject. Did the academic recognition of fashion have an effect on history, anthropology, ethnology, and the economy?

F.M: In fact, fashion had problems and is still having problems being taken seriously as a "scientific" subject. As a result, its academic recognition was late coming. It has not really fully happened even today. If we take the university courses in different Western countries, the courses on fashion are practically non-existent and, in any case, when they do exist, are limited to specialised or vocational streams. We are lucky to come across fashion history lessons, but these exist mainly in British and American universities who traditionally propose this type of course in their art history departments. Some university traditions can be mentioned. However, the main reason for the difficulty fashion has in being taken seriously as a science subject is that it is considered to be lightweight. Sociology and history subjects are in general heavyweight. And in addition, history and sociology have tended to send fashion back and forth between them as they don't seem to know what to do with it. In a way, the same goes for economics, even though the fashion industry generates huge profits and creates thousands of jobs. As for anthropology and ethnology, they have always been interested in the functions and meanings of the appearance in primitive societies but fashion is a very different phenomenon, one that exists in Western society...

O.A: Historically, what are the main trends in fashion sociology?

F.M: We can consider that Tarde, Veblen and Simmel were the founders, or, in any case, the forerunners of a sociology of fashion. However, their work differs in as much as Tarde's reflection was about fashions in general and Veblen's was above all economic. To tell the truth, it was really Simmel who founded a proper fashion sociology with his concepts of imitation and distinction which imposed themselves during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were treated differently by Kroeber, Spencer or Tönnies. We can then distinguish three main trends: the first of which, with the work of König and Bell for example, and to which we must add Descamps' psycho-social perspective, set up a real sociology of fashion in the style of Simmel or Veblen; a second trend that placed fashion within the broader framework of a sociology of culture, of which Bourdieu, but also Yonnet are the best representatives; the third trend, a little on the edge of sociology, constituted of Barthes' semiotic take and current feminist perspectives. We should add a final trend, the one I represent, that, by attempting to have fashion appear as a symbolic thought of the social, develops a sociology of fashion imagery and an anthropology of the collective unconscious around fashion.

O.A: How are these trends represented historically and currently in France and abroad?

F.M: The sociology of fashion essentially, if not exclusively covers four countries: France, Germany, Great Britain and the U.S. We could say that the German above all developed a real sociology of fashion, with Simmel first and then König, from a systematic perspective in any case. In France, reflection on the phenomenon of clothes fashion happened within a larger "whole", that of the sociology of culture that covers clothing, but also food, sport etc. or in a more oblique manner, like Barthes' semiotics that today appears heavy handed. I

have tried to focus on fashion only while at the same time placing it within the broader framework of the sociology of the collective unconscious. In the U.S., besides Veblen, it is the feminist reconsideration that has recently produced fresh analysis. The British contribution is both large and spontaneous. Bell is not really a sociologist, more a writer, Laver a historian, and more recently the books by Ted Polhemus are not really academic works per se.

O.A: Does sociology have to contend with the moral reservations of a sociologist when treating a subject seen to be frivolous or unimportant?

F.M: Yes, this is most probably the main problem. Incidentally, the reservations are not just moral, there are doubts as to its belonging to a whole philosophical tradition. Or, if you like, moral reservations determined by a whole tradition of thought that, in the West, searches for the essence behind the appearance and decreed that "you can't judge a book by its cover", and which refused the idea that appearances can be more than skin deep. A turnaround is thus necessary. Developing a sociology of fashion involves in fact placing the garment as a primary, founding element, not as a secondary, accessory element, but one that determines individual behaviour as much as social structures. This approach is the basis for my own work, *La Frivolité essentielle* (The essential frivolity) which, rather than searching to grasp the relationship between contemporary man and clothing directly, considers that it is above all indirectly, through one's subconscious and not through reality that our relationship to our clothes are determined.

O.A: What in fashion is interesting for the sociologist? Is it fashion itself or the social mechanisms (distinction, representation, imitation) that underlie fashion that catch the attention?

F.M: Both. For my own part anyway. Fashion is an artistic creation, to the same extent as other creations and it deserves to be treated

as such. Marguerite Duras wanted to see Yves Saint Laurent as a writer and her position was totally legitimate. In as much as the turnaround mentioned above happened, this study is decisive. But the underlying social mechanisms are also, of course, a subject to be observed by the fashion sociologist. And I would add, more important even, is that which brings the two together, the possibility to access deep social layers through fashion, if we have carried out the philosophical turnaround necessary to place fashion at the centre of sociological examination, and we have given ourselves the correct methodological means to study these images. Fashion seems to me to be one of the privileged subjects of the deep sociology of the subconscious. As a result it is not far from the territory of psycho analysis.

O.A: What are the links between the sociological approach and the use of this knowledge by business to understand, anticipate and influence the behaviour of their clients?

F.M: The links could and should be very strong. The approach of trend books for example is quite close to the sociological approach, well, to mine anyway. But the relations are still extremely informal and need to be developed if there is to be any real synergy. There are, differences however, mainly in terms of objectives. Businesses want to understand the mechanisms of fashion in order to sell more. They have everything to gain from a more precise reading of fashion. The approach of the sociologist can be to improve market knowledge and to glean marketing information such as understanding the success of a particular designer through the way his or her creative universe corresponds to the general trend of the times. But it goes even further: it enables the sociologist to describe the underground state of a society through clothing and fashion and, to this end, its importance goes beyond mere business and becomes philosophical, political and social.

**Balzac, Honoré de**

French writer (Tours, 1799–Paris, 1850). Throughout *La Comédie humaine*, Honoré de Balzac carries out a study of mores that he sees as “the biggest store of documents we possess on human nature”. In his ninety-five novels, one of his favourite means of character illustration, whether it be personality or social class, was clothing, used as “the most energetic of all symbols”. In addition he wrote short texts on *The art of tying one’s tie in all known and used manners, taught and illustrated in sixteen lessons...* by the Baron Émile de L’Empesé, an unmissable book for all our “fashionables” (1827), or the *Théorie de la démarche* (1833), or even the *Traité de la vie élégante* (1830) in which he incites the reader to use terms such as “l’*élégantologie*” (elegantology), “la *vestignomie*” (garmentonomy), “la *modilogie*” (fashionology)... Faced with the equality and uniformity that resulted from the French revolution, and the “brusque absence of etiquette” of the Restoration, Balzac saw salvation only in fashion and elegance: the principle of the suit is in the harmony of shades and the rapport between garments and architecture without useless ornament. The aristocratic encyclopaedia concerns people of fashion: “A man becomes rich, he is born elegant. The brute covers himself, the rich or the stupid man dons clothing, the elegant man dresses himself. One’s appearance is the expression of one’s mind.” An anthology of the descriptions of clothing from *La Comédie Humaine* is available in *Le vêtement chez Balzac* from IFM-Regard (2001).

**Barthes, Roland**

French critic and semiotician, lecturer at the Collège de France (Cherbourg, 1915–Paris, 1980). Author of fifteen works (*Le Degré*

*zéro de l’écriture*, *Mythologies*, *Michelet par lui-même*, etc.), Roland Barthes proposes the semiological analysis of a vast range of terms, objects, characters and myths. In *Système de la mode* (1967), he sees the system as being closed, empty and reflexive, semantically perfect in which meaning is finally no more than the sign itself. Fashion only has meaning if dealt with by language. The description of fashion hides the meaning behind the functional and the arbitrary behind the necessary and through this double rationalisation it attempts to found fashion as a natural right. He distinguishes between the “naturalist” system that constantly tries to refer to the real and the concrete and is the method of the popular press and the “logical” system that is empty, reflexive, a simple permutation of signs and preferred by the quality press. In addition to his fashion study, Roland Barthes attempted a structural analysis of the garment using the different significant terms as an applied exercise in semiotics. We also have him to thank for a reflection on “*Histoire et sociologie du vêtement*”, where the garment and fashion are analysed according to the Saussurian language/word distinction. All of his articles and interviews on the subject of fashion have been gathered together in a collection, *Le bleu est à la mode cette année*, published by IFM-Regard (2001).

**Baudelaire, Charles**

French writer (Paris, 1821–id., 1867). Baudelaire was another fan of fashion, art and modernity. He wrote texts such as: *Le Beau*, *La Mode et le Bonheur*, *L’Artiste*, *Le Dandy*, *L’Éloge du maquillage*. A dandy himself, he designed his own, unusually cut black suit and saw in his fellow dandies “the last flash of heroism in decadence”. Fashion should “astonish, charm; an idol, it must dress up to be adored. It doesn’t matter if the trick and artifice are a secret for no one as long as success is assured and the effect always irresistible”. He wanted to rehabilitate and avenge dressing up. “Fashion must be considered as a symptom of the taste for

the ideal swimming in the human brain... a permanent and successive attempt to reform nature. A fashion must not be considered to be dead, if we wish to appreciate it fully. All fashion is legitimately charming."

#### Baudrillard, Jean

French sociologist (Reims, 1929). Baudrillard's approach to fashion brought together psychoanalysis and political economics. For him, even more than the market that destroys the value of work, usefulness and rarity to keep only its market value, fashion participates in the distortion and the destruction of values. It annihilates all real values to retain only the notion of newness. It represents the limit of the level of change tolerated by a system, without changing anything essential. Fashion exists when a shape is no longer produced from itself but reproduced according to a model. The force of fashion is so violent that it cannot be banished, refusing to follow fashion is a fashion in itself with no references (except itself), nothing can escape it. It destroys the linear progress with a never-ending return to retro fashion: it is not current, the frivolity of death (fashion is out of fashion). Within a distinction between light signs (clothes, bodies, objects) and heavy signs (political, moral, economic, scientific, cultural) Baudrillard presents a radical position where fashion acts in the production of meaning of a culture and where science has already passed on to an aesthetic level, subject to fashion. The question of that which escapes fashion brings him to this question: does fashion only touch the surface, the vulgarisation and media frenzy, or has it spread to the deep structure of things and beings? He published: *Le Système des objets* (1968), *La Société de consommation* (1970), *L'Échange symbolique et la mort* (1976), *De la séduction* (1979), etc.

#### Burgelin, Olivier

Lecturer at the *École pratique des hautes études* (Metz, 1933). For Olivier Burgelin, fashion is a question of social psychology, of sociological formalisation, of ethnological or anthropological research, of the application of psycho-analysis to the garment... At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he highlighted the appearance of a new class of fashion leaders and behaviour that was not linked to social hierarchy, made up of individuals with "alternative" dress habits. The regular appearance of these new competitors (young people, adolescents, "DIY dressers"... ) led him to consider fashion as "the symbolic expression of the fluctuation of social status". Socially, it is the mark of changing dynamics of a given society, each group experiencing their own trend as an expression of freedom, unlike those of the other groups.

#### Carlyle, Thomas

Scottish historian, critic and philosopher (Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire, 1795–London, 1881). Author of the first book entirely dedicated to fashion entitled *Sartor Resartus* where he formulated his theory: "Clothes have made Men of us; they are threatening to make Clothes-screens of us." We should note in this book that touches on everything, a repeated invitation to meditate on the lies of the appearance. Our clothing does not find its *raison d'être* in protection or modesty, but in the ornamental and symbolic, proof of this is the existence of tattoos and body ornaments. Thus, what would hierarchical distinction and the majesty of social function be without clothing? Carlyle stigmatises our extravagances with humour and attempts to explore their moral, political, religious influences in a metaphysical vertigo. The tailor, a modest artisan with no great prestige, is here given a symbolic majesty, due to his power to make a man through clothes as "society is founded on clothes". Dandies who live to dress are the poets of clothing, and the essence of all science resides in the philosophy of clothing.

With a demonstration through the absurd Carlyle invites us to reflect on the distinction between our basic reality and the envelopes we use to cover and disguise ourselves.

**Deslandres, Yvonne**

French archivist-paleographer (Paris, 1923–Paris, 1986), General Delegate of the Union française des Arts du costume. Yvonne Deslandres was, from 1967, Director of the centre de documentation du Costume, and curator at the musée des Arts décoratifs, she organised and expanded the costume and library collections and organised exhibitions all around the world. As a historian, she continued the work of François Boucher, by highlighting the differences between representations (paintings, fashion engravings, catalogues...) and the clothes as they are really worn and insisting on the material data on the way clothes were manufactured. She was attentive to the economic and social implications and worked on the meaning of clothing as an indicator of age, social class, ethnicity, profession, political, religious, sporting, artistic opinions or activities etc. She wrote a number of books and exhibition catalogues and notably contributed to the rediscovery of Paul Poiret by writing a monographic study (Éditions du Regard, Paris, 1986) and gave her analysis of clothing in *Le costume, image de l'homme* republished in 2002 by the IFM and the éditions du Regard. Her last work entitled, *Histoire de la mode au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Somogy, 1986), written in collaboration with Florence Müller, was the first to outline the contours of a history rich in events and characters to which she was a witness but in which she was also an actor in her own right.

**Lipovetsky, Gilles**

Philosophy professor (1944). Gilles Lipovetsky has published *L'Ère du vide* (1983) and *L'Empire de l'éphémère. La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes* (1987). For Lipovetsky, fashion is no

longer an aesthetic luxury, it is a real actor within the social system of production, consumption, distribution and communication. This problem, apparently futile but infinitely complex, lands us at the heart of Western modernity where the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw what Lipovetsky referred to as the “second phase of democracies”, that of seduction, the ephemeral and marginal differentiation. Beyond the issues that grow out of a society dedicated to the obsolescence of things and meaning, “finished fashion” is presented as an instrument of consolidation for liberal societies and, as a result, a frivolous society is no reason for despair. This gives a different interpretation to the social distinction that has become the keystone, but which doesn't help us to explain the logic of inconstancy and its great changes.

**Roche, Daniel**

Daniel Roche is a lecturer at Paris I and course director at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (Paris, 1935). In his book *La Culture des apparences. Une histoire du vêtement. XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 1989, he studies a period which was very rich in social transformation, during which fashion was no longer an expression of the social mechanisms of representation at court, but became a major theme for encyclopedists and philosophers, preachers, physiocrats, rousseauists, mercantilists, liberals, economists, Christians. With the revolution, the Napoleonic era, the Bourgeois restoration and romanticism, fashion became the element of reference of material, political, intellectual and symbolic civilisations. He also covers the materials available for the historical study of clothing and fashion and the eventual problems posed: the conservation of fabrics and garments, the figurative sources (paintings, engravings) and their channels, collections of costumes and amusing shops, archive material (from solicitors, merchants, manufacturers, families), and literary or scientific analyses.

### Simmel, Georg

German philosopher and sociologist (Breslau, 1858–Strasbourg, 1918). Professor in Berlin and Strasbourg. As early as 1905, Simmel developed a vision of fashion as an instrument that satisfied the need for belonging and community as well as the need for differentiation and isolation, the fashionable individual feels singular and original while benefiting from the approval of people of good taste who dress like him. Thus fashion becomes a remarkable social institution, creating a synthesis between the need for conformity, belonging and security and the need to stand out, for distinction and individualism. It is the fruit of a marriage between conformity and vanity, it is a search for personal expression and social belonging and provides “adventure without risk”. In his essay entitled “La mode”, in *Tragédie de la culture*, Georg Simmel tries to understand fashion independently from a history of the garment, as an invaluable process for modern society, “the vital form of fashion is natural to man as a social being”. It is thus the expression of the characteristic values of a given society, but also the expansion of the needs that result from its own development.

### Tarde, Gabriel de

French sociologist (Sarlat, 1843–Paris, 1904). In his book *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890), he offers one of the first analyses of fashion as a social process independent from clothing and one that applies also to language, religion, politics or literature. He distinguishes two strains, invention and imitation, with alternating periods of innovation (fashion) and imitation (customs). Any new fashion aspires to take root as a custom but only a small number manage to do so, losing their originality on the way. While the influence of the ancestors and the past give way to the suggestions of the innovators and the future, the ages of custom give way to the ages of fashion. When the spirit of fashion was born, behaviour and institutions were upturned by the attraction for the new

and the fascination for modernity. Gabriel de Tarde, the founder of social psychology, is the first to have brought fashion out of the ghetto of frivolity and to have recognised it as a theoretical concept. He saw a general form of sociability that enables us to define eras and civilisations according to his principles.

### Veblen, Thorstein

American economist (Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, 1857–Menlo Park, California, 1929). In *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen sharply criticises the American gentry of the time. Capitalism in its advanced stage created a discrimination against manual work considered unworthy, and the leisure class manifested itself through waste, luxury and “conspicuous consumption” and ceremonious leisure. This gave rise to a culture of parties, gastronomy, decorative arts, fashion and the entire economy of prestige where refinement, distinction and the canons of respectability were established according to appearance and rules and good manners. For Veblen, fashion was a consumption with no real necessity, the only aim of which was to manifest one’s dominant position, behaviour similar to the “potlatch” of the Indian tribes on the pacific coast.

### Yonnet, Paul

French sociologist (1948). Paul Yonnet studied fashion in *Jeux, modes et masses* (1985). In order to outline the different signs of the garment, he presents nine categories through which a garment can inform us as to sex, age, social position, activity, culture, place and moment, health, morals and the ideological or religious position of the wearer. He also examines the rise in indifferences (sexual dimorphism has been replaced by age dimorphism), the ready-to-wear revolution of jeans and sportswear and the importance of the influence of youth on adult style. He analyses appearance as a

competition with huge consequences, where each person is considered responsible for the image they project. He broadens his conclusions to the fashion for popular games, jogging, rock, pop, punk, cars, etc.

1. We would like to thank the éditions du Regard for giving us permission to reproduce the extracts from the latest edition of the Dictionnaire International de la Mode (edited by Lydia Kamitsis and Bruno Remaury, Paris, 2005).

A lexicon of writings

Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode*, Paris, Seuil, 1983.

A work of applied semiotics. The author outlines a system of meanings through the semantic analysis of fashion using press descriptions as a departure point. Roland Barthes examined fashion from a totally new point of view: his basic material came from descriptions in the fashion press, thus revealing a system of meanings that he analysed from a semantic angle for the first time ever: how do men make sense through their clothes and words? This book, which has become a classic, is one of the most remarkable examples of the application of semiotics to a cultural issue.

Roland Barthes, *Le bleu est à la mode cette année et autres articles*, Institut Français de la Mode, 2001.

This is a book that brings together all of Barthes' articles and interviews on fashion between 1955 and 1983. For all of those who found *Système de la Mode* inaccessible, this collection of articles highlights and simplifies Barthes' thinking on the status and role of fashion and clothing in our society. An analysis that has lost none of its relevance and which, on the contrary, 30 years later, enables us to measure the coherence of a phenomenon that has grown and grown in the meantime.

Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, Paris, Galilée, 1979.

This is an overview of the social reality around the theme of seduction. The author's intuitive analysis is on the border between literature, philosophy and sociol-

ogy. His method may lack precision in the eyes of formal logicians, but his thinking works by hypotheses, exclusions and provocation. Baudrillard develops his theme through successive inclusive stages around the sphere where seduction works: women, sexuality, stars, games, animal seduction, *trompe l'œil*, etc. he borrows the theoretical baggage needed from Freud, Lacan, Kierkegaard, Foucault and Saussure.

Quentin Bell, *Mode et société. Essai sur la sociologie du vêtement*, Paris, PUF, 1992.

This is a theoretical essay on clothing and fashion. The two English language editions were published in 1945 and 1978. The author changed some elements of his theory, but remained faithful to the idea that fashion is linked to class structure taking inspiration from Thorstein Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class.

Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, Minuit, 1979.

It is difficult today to measure the originality of Bourdieu's work whose influence on the sociology of taste was major for over three decades. Classifiers, classed by their classifications, social subjects distinguish themselves by the distinctions they operate – between the tasty and the insipid, the beautiful and the ugly, the chichi and the chippy, the distinguished and the vulgar – and where they express or betray their position in objective classification. The analysis of relations between classification systems (taste) and the living conditions (social class) they translate in a transfigured form in objectively systematic choices ("class") leads thus to a social critique of judgement that is inseparable from a table of social classes and lifestyles. This is an in-depth social study of the variations of taste and judgement concerning beauty, art and culture. Using graphics, tables and statistical elements, the author analyses the variations in taste according to eras and social classes.

Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor resartus. La philosophie du vêtement* [1833], Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1992.

Sartor Resartus is an autobiography in three books, published by an imaginary editor, of the fictional German professor Diogenes Tenfelsdrockh. In book 1 the professor and his "philosophy of clothes" are presented to the reader, described as the result of some mystical experience. Book 2 tells of Tenfelsdrockh's childhood, his education, first love, disillusion, wanderings, loss and rediscovery of his faith. Book 3 develops the philosophy that it is only through "clothes" that we truly understand life. Man should throw off his "self" and turn to others. He must dispossess himself of all of his purely material desires and focus on the spiritual.

Yvonne Deslandres, *Le costume, image de l'homme*, Institut Français de la Mode/Regard, 2002.

French archivist-paleographer (Paris, 1923–Paris, 1986). General Delegate of the Union française des Arts du costume, Yvonne Deslandres was, from 1967, Director of the centre de documentation du Costume, and curator at the musée des Arts décoratifs, she organised and expanded the costume and library collections and organised exhibitions all around the world. As a historian, she highlighted the differences between representations (paintings, fashion engravings, catalogues...) and the clothes as they are really worn and insisting on the material data on the way clothes were manufactured. Her writings include: *Histoire des soins de beauté* (in collaboration with Jacques Pinset), *Histoire de la mode au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* in collaboration with Florence Müller), *5 000 ans d'élégance*, *Voir Paris*, a book on Delacroix, *L'enfant et son image*, etc. This reference book written in 1976 by one of the forerunners of the scientific study of clothing in France was out of print for many years. It is not just another history of clothing but more a multi-level analysis of the complex issue of clothing, from the material data to psychological motivation. Yvonne Deslandres built a global analytical structure

around the question of clothes that explores historiographical sources, manufacturing, the changes in the shape of clothing in tandem with a moral history, its function as a social sign as well as its taxinomical roles between ages, classes, functions, professions or particular activity as well as its status as the reflection of the personal expression of the individual.

Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, London, Berg Publishers, 2004.

The author, a lecturer at the Fashion Institute of Technology, proposes an introduction to the sociology of fashion. Unlike usual fashion writing, her contribution establishes a distinction between the garment, a tangible material product, and fashion, a symbolic cultural product. She debunks the myth of the genius designer and takes down the institutional structure, ignored by many fashion theorists, that has shaped and produced the phenomenon that is fashion. The change that is inherent to the very concept of fashion is systematically driven institutionally and controlled the organisations, groups, events and practices of the fashion system. Kawamura further shows how the structural nature of the fashion system works to legitimise designers creativity and can make them successful. All of the players in this system, buyers, journalists and others participate in the production of fashion. Newer fashion cities, such as Milan and New York, are the product of the fashion system that originated in Paris. Without the systemic structure, fashion culture would not exist. Fashion-ology provides a big picture approach that focuses on the social process behind fashion and its perpetuation.

Gilles Lipovestky, *L'Empire de l'éphémère*, Gallimard, 1991.

How did fashion appear in the West at the end of the middle ages? How can we explain the versatility of elegance that exists in no

other civilisation? What are the great historical moments, the structures that determined the social organisation of appearances? These are the questions that this book attempts to answer, the logic of social distinction is no longer the cover-all for frivolous inconstancy. But fashion today is no longer an aesthetic and peripheral luxury to collective life, it is a general working process in the social mix that entails the production and consumption of objects, advertising, culture, media, ideological and social changes. We have entered the second phase of the secular life of democracies organised more and more around seduction, the ephemeral and marginal differentiation. Beyond the worries that can result from a society dedicated to the obsolescence of things and meaning, the "finished fashion" appears, paradoxically and not without some ambiguity, as an instrument of light and modernising dynamism.

Frédéric Monneyron (dir.) *Le Vêtement* (Cerisy conference), L'Harmattan, 2003.

While clothing is what most obviously differentiates man from animal, immediately distinguishes men from one another or best identifies an era, it has been largely ignored academically as a subject. This is doubtless because writing about clothes implies a reverse of any philosophical attitude: having to place clothes not as an aside but as the mould, the matrix, not as a secondary, accessory element but as a primary, founding element that determines individual behaviour as much as social structure; in short, to take the risk of "In the beginning was the garment". Nonetheless this was a risk taken by the conference held in the summer of 1998 in Cerisy-la-Salle that brought together psychoanalysts and psychiatrists; philosophers, aesthetics experts and sociologists; literary critics and art critics and fashion industry professionals in a broad inter-disciplinary perspective that was essential given the previous lack of study. The resulting book attempts to answer a certain number

of questions. What is the importance of clothing in the construction of one's identity, whether it be individual or collective? Why is it largely absent from the field of psychoanalytical interrogation? What can its function be in literary and artistic creation? Is it possible to establish a theory of clothing and fashion?

Philippe Perrot, *Les dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie*, Editions Complexe, 1984.

Philippe Perrot retraces the history of clothing under the triumphant reign of the bourgeoisie in general, and Parisian bourgeoisie in particular, through material that is complex to handle, especially through literature and pictorial art.

Daniel Roche, *La culture des apparences*, Seuil, 1991.

Even more so than today, the dress habits under the Ancien Régime reflected the social codes and the moral and religious imperatives of the day. This book gives a history of clothing, its economy, how styles spread and its social significance.

Georg Simmel, *Philosophie de la modernité*, Payot, 1989.

Whether he studied women, art or the city in the society of his time, Georg Simmel always questioned modernity and its aesthetic values characterised by individualism and the dissolution of stable content, change and mobility. Conflict is an essential component, present on every level of reality, inherent to life itself; this category enabled Simmel to decode the crisis in contemporary culture.

Georg Simmel, "La mode" in *La tragédie de la culture et autres essais*, Paris, Rivages, 1993.

The dialectic of the individual and the group is at the origin of Simmel's reflection on fashion in *la Tragédie de la Culture*. He expresses the overlapping of two tensions between, on the one hand the individual and the group, that fashion solves by enabling membership of a group (the group who believe in pointy shoes) while at the same time standing out within that group (my pointy shoes are orange and are 27 cms high). From this Simmel deduces that fashion satisfies both the desire for communication and the desire for singularisation. On the other hand, the tension that organises the structure of fashion corresponds to a dialectic between the extension (the number of people who follow a fashion: a good fraction of society of it is a true fashion) and the length of time its lasts (usually not very long). So Simmel's take on fashion is that of a phenomenon that is symptomatic of a certain modernity within which the multiplication of nerve stimuli is the corollary of the decline in both renewal and history.

Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation*, Paris, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2001.

Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) was a criminologist, sociologist and philosopher and was a professor at the Collège de France. His influence was widespread in the U.S. and among authors such as Gilles Deleuze. Gabriel Tarde enables us to understand modern society. He covered the social fabric, the press, the public, of universal uniformisation and fashion. He followed all inventions, big and small, step by step. Why and how do they spread to an entire country and then the whole world? A social group is a collection of beings that are imitating one another. By definition, a social fact is one that grows and spreads. Tarde was thus a forerunner of the most modern historiography. This gives a concrete sociology that is particularly useful at a time where society is changing faster and faster and where questions are being asked about the next step.

Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, French edition - Gallimard, 1979.

In his study of the upper strata (*Theory of the Leisure Class* – 1899) of the American gentry, Veblen noted that it had a tendency to waste both time and money. When members of the gentry favoured a life of leisure they were wasting time and when they indulged in conspicuous consumption they were wasting money. For Veblen consumption is a status issue, it is useful to those who use it ostentatiously to indicate their social position. In other words, someone who buys a luxury car may be indicating to the purchaser of a family car that "due to my status, my consumption need not reflect my needs". When the American gentry at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used numerous servants, they were indicating that they were above needs, the more servants they had the more they affirmed the fact that they were in need of nothing. This is a basic social science concept and we come across it again in one form or another in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert K. Merton and to a different extent in the work of Jean Baudrillard. For Bourdieu, frequenting certain places and having the aesthetic and culinary tastes of the upper classes are status issues. This is what Merton refers to as the latent function of consumption.

Paul Yonnet, *Jeux, modes et masses*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985.

Horse racing, or the unpredictable ways of adhering to the rituals of democracy; jogging, or using the body to deal with crisis; rock music, or the invention of the adolescent "internationale"; domestic animals, or testing the limits of the human; the automotive society, or falling into a universe of mobility; the generalisation of fashion, or the start of a new logic of the appearance; all of these are samples of the great change, that since 1945, has not just revolutionised lifestyles, but has literally created another society. Here, they are analysed from two angles: their universal meaning, as expres-

sions of mass democratic society, and from the point of view of specific resistance in French society against modernity. This is an effort to think about society in its very movement against the "critical" prejudice inspired by an ageing elitism and splitting with academic sociology that is mired in the categories of another age.

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June 2006, Six-monthly publication

RESEARCH CENTER *IfM*  
INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE

33 rue Jean Goujon  
75008 Paris  
France

T. + 33(0)1 56 59 22 22  
F. + 33(0)1 56 59 22 00

[www.ifm-paris.com](http://www.ifm-paris.com)

Publication Director:  
Olivier Assouly  
[oassouly@ifm-paris.com](mailto:oassouly@ifm-paris.com)

Contributors:  
Bruno Remaury, Frédéric Monneyron

In charge of publishing:  
Dominique Lotti

*IfM*

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE  
33, rue Jean Goujon 75008 Paris T. +33 (0)1 56 59 22 22 F. +33 (0)1 56 59 22 00  
[www.ifm-paris.com](http://www.ifm-paris.com)