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## **Editorial**

In as much as novelty and trends are an intrinsic part of fashion, it is closely linked to modernity, which is itself characterised by a rejection of tradition, the valorisation of the individual and a wide-reaching process of emancipation. What remains to be seen is in what way the two terms act on one another. At what point does the conjunction occur? Is fashion still a vector for modernity? Of course the idea of modernity, its evolution and its crisis must be outlined. What do we mean by modern when its successor, the “postmodern” creates remixes between the different aesthetic

forms, be they artistic or quotidian, and even between more than one era? Perhaps modernity opens up the critical possibility to build and invent oneself as opposed to the authoritarian character of fashion, itself counterpointed with the advent of the digital age and virtual consumer communities, amateurs to boot – and, as such, modern.

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# Fashion and Modernity

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During the renaissance, fashion seems to have accompanied modernity due to their common premises: throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the reinforcement of modern thought developed in tandem with the exponential development of the fashion industry, that was to rapidly touch society as a whole, from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie down to the ordinary people in the villages and countryside via servants and fairs and markets. Even more recently at the beginning of the post-modern era, a technological age characterised by changing and scattered ideas saw the emergence of a very industrialised, polymorphous, differentiated fashion. So, what is the nature of the link that connects fashion and modernity? A shared aversion for inertia due to a need for progress and novelty? However, doesn't fashion represent the very negation of modernity as it imposes itself on the subject as a thing in itself? And what if this union was but a symptom of modernity going slightly off the rails?

Under the reign of François I<sup>er</sup>, and then under Henri II, various edicts were decreed that forbade the bourgeoisie from wearing gold or silver fabrics, or from decorating their garments with pearls. These extravagant laws transposed the customs of a secular morality into canonical norms, notably encouraging moderation in the consumption of material goods, in line with one's place in the social hierarchy.

A tradition was thus established with a very strict hierarchy in terms of what could and could not be worn. Clothes were codified in terms of shape –the size and cut of dresses were regimented– as were materials –silk was reserved for the presidents of the Cours des comptes, satin for the King's people, taffeta for the clerks...

It is tempting to see these edicts as the high point of the tradition. However, they marked its decline: in fact, when legislation is called on to forbid deviant behaviour in a society that is regimented by dress, this means in general that this deviant behaviour already exists and is widespread enough to require sanctions. So, the 1514 edict that strictly forbade "all persons, commoners, non nobles (...) to set themselves up as noble through their dress or their qualities"<sup>1</sup>, signalled the real existence of attitudes that go against tradition –in this case the wearing of garments normally reserved for the aristocracy by people who did not belong to the aristocracy.

Here we can analyse the issue in two ways. On the one hand, by concentrating on the specific object –the garment– we can see the first fashion movements in the passing of these decrees. Indeed, as we have seen, if the main objective behind these laws was to legislate on dress codes in terms of social rank, this means that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was already a sort of "imitative" surge which meant the bourgeoisie copied –or, according to their fiercest adversaries, "aped", the behaviour and manners of the nobility. However, this dress imitation was still illicit in a society based on a symbolic order that promoted the image of an analogical hierarchical world. In this "analogical" world, each rank had its own manners, that included a dress code: so a stiff social hierarchy had a correspondingly stiff dress code, incarnating traditional power struggles and proclaiming the almost "cosmic" authority of the feudal ruling classes. Fashion, understood as a movement of imitation in which a manner, or a type of behaviour or even a "taste" spread through imitation and cross through broader and broader layers of society seems thus to have come into being at this time of transition

between two radically different epistemes. So, dress, which until then had changed very slowly, that had only competed against other “geographical” forms of dress seems to have begun to evolve at a faster rate. This is the important point: these decrees signal the end of an era. By stepping back from the specific object, the garment, it is possible to see them as an essentially vain attempt to maintain the validity of an episteme that had already been superseded, the episteme founded on tradition. What these dress code laws signified were the beginnings of modernity –if we consider modernity to be an ideal, after the (re)-discovery of the subject, aiming to fight the contingencies of tradition and the arbitrariness of power, by resorting to reason. Fashion and modernity seem thus to be two contemporary movements, born out of a common surge against the prejudices of the order of tradition. In addition, beyond this shared tension, fashion and modernity seem to have been both carried by the emergence of the subject, seen as an autonomous, critical instance guided by reason in the discovery and affirmation of the self. Regarding modernity, this conjecture is almost a tautology: regarding fashion, it can be defended by the analysis of certain of the prescriptions in the *savoir-vivre* (lifestyle) annals that appeared throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. So, according to Erasmus in *The Civilities*, the legitimate manner in which to dress is that which enables one to project an image that is in line with the reality of one’s being: this injunction could of course lead us to think that the subject, having become an eminently central element in thought, was to determine even dress code from then on. But it can also be interpreted as the survival of the old analogical order that links the rank of a person to the very essence of the subject ontologically. In any case, it enables us to understand that fashion can indubitably constitute one of the places where the autonomous and critical subject, promoted by modernity, can be incarnated. It is indeed the case when the subject is not subject to any “transcendence” when it invents a manner of dressing that conforms to what it is or, at least, to what it wants to be. However, are we still talking about fashion? Such occur-

rences are quite uncommon in the history of fashion (which makes them all the more brilliant). They always seem to come from the eccentric, they find their quintessential representative later on in the figure of the dandy: how can the exceptional character of such fashion experiments be explained? Perhaps by the difficulty that is inherent in the very attempt to define fashion according to the criteria of modernity, meaning according to the determinations of an autonomous and critical subject. Who indeed, within a hierarchical society could want to appear as he actually is? If the “sociable man, always outside of himself, only knows how to live in the opinion of others”<sup>2</sup>, then those who are ready to accept the totality of their being are rare, and even less likely to manifest it when the totality of the being is marked with signs of domination.

This is why we doubtless need to come back to our initial definition of fashion, seen as a cyclical and imitative movement, all the more so since this return seems to be founded in history: it would appear in fact that, as early as the revolution, dress could no longer provide information as to the person or their status as appearances had already become quite uniform. However, it inverted the terms of the problem as, in this perspective, fashion appeared as a hindrance to the life of the autonomous and critical subject promoted by modernity. As it made its way, fashion became no longer a “way of dressing” invented by a subject who chose freely with full awareness, between a number of different appearances (as, of course, the idea of inventing fashions is not the case here). On the contrary, fashion exists in cycles, prescriptive trends running through society with the strength of the “thing in itself”, of the unknowable metaphysical object. It manifests itself always not so much as a question of subject, and more a question of the individual cut off from his “ethical whole”. It can appear as irrationally as any natural catastrophe, as unpredictably as a cataclysm, or as regularly as the seasons. In any case, the subject has no practical or rational control over it. This is what is shown in very contemporary analysis, such as that of Barthes in *Système de la Mode*: fashion statements are, for some

{Ensemble A}, the vectors of alienation masked by apparent naturalness; for others {Ensemble B}, emanations of a reflexive, tautological arbitrary. In his relation to fashion the individual is located in fine in a relationship of object to object: by agreeing to conform to a trend that they take for a “thing in itself” despite its eminently social essence – “this year’s colour is emerald green”, “this year big bags are all the rage”, “this year high-waisted jeans are in” – they give up being an actor. They adopt a contemplative attitude through which they become spectators of their own existence. Confronted with these trends that the individual can’t really rationalise, they no longer actively participate in the process in which they act on their environment, but absorb the different “fashions” without feeling qualitatively concerned by it. In this way, fashion is closely linked to the process of reification and, as such, seems to oppose modernity.

But how do we reconcile this contradiction with the coincidence of fashion and modernity that we saw earlier? How did fashion, that was born with modernity, manage to transform into a contrary phenomenon? Up until now, we have examined issues closely linked with fashion. However, as we noticed in the previous paragraph, fashion brings up the question of reification, and we must now examine the idea of modernity and go back to the very era in which it was invented. For a number of authors, including Norbert Elias, the emergence of the modern subject and the exaltation of reason against the arbitrary nature of tradition can not be separated from the transformations happening within the social structure. Thus, the low Renaissance is characterised by the rise in strength of the bourgeoisie, “needy”, then industrious, historically harbingers of new values, individualist and utilitarian, the absolute opposite of feudal morals. In addition, this period saw the twilight of the aristocracy, considered in its historical military role. The aristocracy was confronted with the constitution of the centralised and absolute monarchic state, and thus taken up in an irreversible process of “curialisation” by which the practices of the court spread beyond the court, and the disappearance of the tradi-

tional foundations of its legitimacy. This double movement set up a frenetic competition between the two classes: one fighting for recognition of its new place in society, while the other, under threat, fought to maintain the privileges of its symbolic monopoly. One, modern, fought tradition while the other on the contrary tried to protect it. One, finally tried to imitate the behaviour and manners of the other in order to undermine it, while the other in an endless spiral, fought back by rendering its manners and behaviour even more sophisticated, more refined. The successive refinements were for example, the use of a fork, enriching garments, or the privatisation of bodily functions. In general, they marked the beginning of civilisation after that of civilities, the negation of man’s animality and the affirmation of the separation between body and soul – that is to say, the establishment of the real material foundations on which the modern idea of the subject was to develop. But, not only that, they represent the main cause of the first “fashion cycles”, in clothing as in all of the areas of self-presentation, as the nobility were in fact obliged to constantly invent new distinctive codes with their own built-in obsolescence as they were inevitably imitated. So, straight away it is obvious that the shared premises of modernity and fashion are intimately linked to the social upheaval that followed on from the birth of capitalism and the advent of the bourgeoisie. However, while fashion appears to have a dynamic that is strictly determined by capitalistic structures, modernity remains a universal ideal, aiming for the progress of human kind in general going beyond any division of society into classes. But modernity in practice in the reification process mentioned above does not correspond to the “initial”, pre-capitalist ideal of modernity: for the thinkers of the Frankfurt school, reification is a social pathology linked to a certain type of modernity, a deficient modernity guided by technical rationalisation, that is itself but a perverted and incomplete form of the reason celebrated and promoted by the Enlightenment. Habermas thus distinguishes instrumental reason, which is but the implementation of effective means in relation to a

given end, from critical, or decided reason, reduced to silence by the capitalist system. In these conditions, fashion would be reduced to being the symptom of a certain degeneration of Reason, that is to say the derailing of modernity; and as such, the analogy between certain heavy trends in current fashion and the pre-contemporary “administered world” described in the *Dialectic of Reason* is striking. In this work, the authors retrace the history of Reason, from its premise, when it aimed to free man from the weight of myth and tradition, up until the contemporary technological era, where Reason, seen as a simple means of dominating nature, has developed into instrumental reason. For them, our era is a new barbaric age where everything is as homogeneous, static, repetitive and difficult to rationalise as in the times of the myth; for us, this description can, to a great extent, reflect the current contradictions in fashion. It is an eminently human creation and manifest itself mainly through massive, “transcendent” and irrational trends. It promises and promotes the new, often seems repetitive, not only due to its fast pace, but also because it endlessly absorbs and reinterprets formal motifs that have become banal. It is very homogenous, even though it promotes the coexistence of different “lifestyles”, it doesn’t seem equipped to get beyond its own reflexive condition. Finally, it is static, as no revolution in the structure or use of clothing seems to have happened for many years. It is indeed the case, just as Walter Benjamin said, the shine of the new is often a decoy that enables a return to the dreaded archaisms.

Fashion, in its current dominant “transcendent” form seems, in many ways, to be the symptom of a social pathology linked to the deficiencies of modernity: a modernity of the surface, consisting much more in terms of blind ignorance of tradition, of love for the new and the celebration of the individual than the promotion of a free, rational autonomous and critical subject. However, on the edges, today as in the past, we note the existence of properly modern fashion behaviour: behaviour through which the subject manifests its distance in relation to the pseudo-naturalism

of fashion, when it decides to take on the codes and play with them. As a possible means of expression, this fashion thus appears as a trace of the latent survival of the pure idea of modernity.

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1. Edict from 1514, quoted in Daniel Roche, *La Culture des apparences*, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1989, p. 54.
2. Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, Paris, Gallimard folio, 1996, p. 123.

1/ The innate link between fashion and modernity has often been stressed. Indeed, modernity and fashion do seem to be intrinsically linked to the point of having been assimilated by one another, both terms digging into the other for the very meaning of their implementation in the reality of the last century, as an emblematic and recurring but at the same time unstable motif, as if resistant to all attempts at conceptualisation, except perhaps in the poetic prose of someone like Baudelaire.

It is just as difficult to conceptualise modernity, which, as Baudrillard told us, is not a concept, but at best a notion that can only be defined by default, the very opposite of tradition. If modernity is so difficult to outline, including its historical scale (modernity began with the industrial age, but, it is true that modern times began with the Renaissance, and historians and university professors are constantly revising the dating of the modern period, and the question as to what is modern and what is not), fashion is no easier, its variations are so numerous, from the recognition of clothing as a fashion object in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, up until the appearance of unisex fashion in the sixties. This is why both seem to rebel against the big theories that try to grasp them into an inclusive point of view (in the same way that we are constantly re-writing modernity in the very movement of its ending or obsolescence, attempts to grasp fashion as a system do not appear convincing, even in the words of a writer as sharp as Roland Barthes).

It would appear that we can, however, agree on certain characteristic traits, that enable us to grasp fashion and modernity, in the movement of their subtle articulation and their

resistance to concept. The level of historical and conceptual instability they both show, bring us back to the ambiguity at their base, the principle of affirmation and subtraction, a mix of order and disorder, of blind faith in progress and insatiable critical passion, the constant research for effectiveness using scientific advances that are transformed into industrial applications on the one hand and the constant search for the gap/distance on the other, the propensity for the abstraction of models and formalisms of science on the one hand and then, the opposite, a passion for the real, the relative, the contingent – a double articulation of the modern project that is at the basis of all of the artistic revolutions of the last century.

In one way, fashion and modernity echo one another in the affirmation of the same principle of contradiction, that makes a crisis a positive value, and time passing a promise and a threat at the same time. Fashion, as a marker of this changing temporality, creates, at the very heart of modernity, that which threatens it from the inside of its affirmations and its founding beliefs. Fashion institutes the overshooting of modernity at the very heart of the movement that founded it, and that brings it paradoxically and inexorably to the side of tradition, in the institution of the “new” as a recurring motif. In this way, the “post” is an integral part of the modern movement, as a regime founded on innovation and an always more aggressive conquest of the future, and, as such, on the rapid “out of dateness” of the objects and signs it attempts to promote. Fashion insinuates doubt and institutes this gap, this disorder that prefigures an order to come at the very heart of modern rationality and its “grand founding narratives”. Finally, fashion teaches us that modernity is a fleeting idea on which a time or an age we could qualify upstream as classic-modern moves like an acrobat, constantly to-ing and fro-ing, and another time, that we could qualify as modern-postmodern, that begins with the affirmation of modernity itself. But the line is a broken one, that seems to wash up on the shores of a present that is difficult to grasp, to which the art of avant-gardes desperately attempts to

attach itself, and which attracts it literally like a magnet, calls for the “presentification” of time and space that resolve themselves, or, more to the point “synthesise themselves” today in new regimes of temporality –where the new modes of time-compressing are the live, the real time, the impossible fusion of the present, past and future promised by end-of-time fantasies and current and virtual games. To the extent that we are able to say that while the first modernity comes under the sign of the conquest of the future and the cult of the new (the famous tradition of the new that Harold Rosenberg spoke of), that invents itself in times and places of everyday life, it is the pure present, the empire of the now that runs our lives today.

2/ Thus, Impressionism, through its exposure of the present as a paradigm for the work of art, was the time and the place of this echo between fashion and modernity under the auspices of a present that was difficult to grasp and retain in its flight. It is useful to stop for a moment to examine the images and metaphors most often associated with fashion phenomena. Their register of predilection, their climax is that of Impressionism, and more generally of all artists, whom, from a certain Realism (that of Courbet, for example), up to Impressionism and Cubism chose to throw off the Christian baggage of fixed things, and to take on board all that is movement, flux, passage, élan, flow, circulation and instability. It is notable that among painters (or even sculptors, Rodin is part of this line of artists), the question is always one of moving away from the paintings of history, and even more so from gaudy mythological references, to work on depicting the quotidian, on time passing, and which means, among other things, in a modern city, the fleeting apparition of passers-by, the new divinities that are like so many invitations to celebrate the value of exhibition against the value of contemplation, entertainment as opposed to worship. This is why the encounter between fashion and modernity in painting happens under the sign of the lightness and frivolity celebrated by the Impressionists, and which is expressed in their taste for floating worlds, everyday scenes,

party and entertainment scenes. Evidence of this was the fashion for Japanese etchings among Impressionists, another genre inspired by a taste for frivolity, for floating worlds and light women that transposed a certain Oriental fashion into the West. This acclaim for the moment was translated into the celebration of the changing weather, a feel for climate, and the emphasis on fluids over solids, on the moving and mobile over the immobile and stable: water, rain, clouds, seas, rivers, snowy landscapes, play on light, reflections, mirrored images and trembling weather in sails, the Impressionists constantly left realism behind in favour of an evanescent and fragile landscape, doomed to disappear like all things ephemeral.

3/ The wave, and even more so the crest that pulls it forward, is doubtless the most appropriate image to characterise the relationship between fashion and history in the modern age. First of all, because the image was greatly favoured by the landscape painters in the 19th century, as a motif that linked romanticism and realism in Courbet, but also because this image, more than any other, was used (as in French the word “vague” is so close to “vogue”, also from the maritime lexicon) to designate trends such as the “nouvelle vague” (new wave) in cinema. Some go beyond simple metaphors, going as far as to quote René Thom’s epistemology to support the idea of the relation between fashion and history as a wave and its crest. So Walter Moser wrote: “Fashions are not outside of history, they encompass and feed off one another. In a naturalising metaphor, their relationship is that of a wave with the crest that rides it and is at the head of its movement. Since Mathematical models of morphogenesis by René Thom, we know that this example is more –or less– just a metaphor. It is a case-study in natural morphogenesis whose topological intelligibility René Thom proposes to transpose to human history. The wave and its crest, distinct in their forms, belong to the same element. History and fashion are both temporal. However, there are “multiple temporalities”, and as Ricoeur says, the “discordances of rhythm between multiple

temporalities”<sup>1</sup>. There is another manner to point out this groping, this overlapping, or the conflicting coexistence between the utopian temporality of modernity, and the immobile temporality of post-modernity.

4/ This leads to an interesting question as to the place, or perhaps the non-place in which fashion is thought and produced to resound with modernity. What is the place of fashion? Fashions are doubtless born in capital cities (and the memory of their place of birth accompanies their movement, retrospectively contributing to the notoriety of certain places that would have ordinarily faded into oblivion), but their mode of propagation, their aptitude for scoffing at frontiers is level with an art that itself tends, in the modern age and with the help of the media and reproduction techniques, to delocalise itself, to free itself from any real connection to a particular location (to the extent that it can provoke the opposite phenomenon of re-conquering a place). Fashion surfs on the waves of time, as it moves from one place to another, in a sort of early globalisation, indifferent to attaching itself to any one location. Fashion aims for the ephemeral of signs and their excess that will only get bigger in the modern world, and not the long-term trace inscribed in concrete places and territories (it is indeed strange to see how many locations that were once so fashionable have now been abandoned, or vaguely intended for an artistic makeover). It was predestined that fashion, that supposes merchandise as entertainment would choose to set up in the famous passages so dear to Walter Benjamin. If modern architecture managed to make its mark it was by following on in a direct line from modernity, as understood as an objective measure and the projection of this measure onto a world given over to calculations, reason and effectiveness, a project that culminated in the Athens charter which was a programme for the treatment of habitation (the word treatment covering both its medical and cybernetic meanings, in as much as later on there would be a science for the “traitement” (processing) of information). Architecture deals with measures and norms, it can

not escape, even in its most radical splits and schisms, this question of rules and calculations, and indeed, architectural modernism has always proclaimed its taste for the geometric, the spare, and normative functionalism as opposed to the ornamental frivolities of art nouveau. However, fashion always deals in the excessive and the exclusive. So, it is difficult to clearly situate fashion in relation to modernity. If by modernity we mean “the wish, at any historical moment, to keep moving, to change, a taste for the speed of history, without being linked to a specific context”<sup>2</sup>, then, yes, of course, fashion is resolutely modern (and will remain so regardless). But, if we place ourselves from the perspective of modern history, and the project that, from the Enlightenment until now, is defined as the continual progress of reason for a better social order (and many people think, like Habermas, that the modern project is not “over yet”), then modernity exceeds the domain of fashion, the long-term aspect of modernity could not exist in the short term returns that are so much a part of fashion (and we could even recognise the fact that modernity has a formidable aptitude for “sedimenting” certain traits or phenomena from fashion, keeping them, in a way despite itself, in universalising nets, sublimating them in the register of the timeless like so many fashion fads that escape fashion). The career trajectory of a designer like Courrèges is a good illustration of this imbroglio of between fashion and modernity, as a designer whose career has always worked on a misunderstanding. Haute couture played but a small part in his master plan, as he was destined (in a modern perspective) to create mainly for ready-to-wear. And indeed, Courrèges tried to abandon haute couture on several occasions but it always managed to catch up with him. In the same way, Courrèges, who was interested in design, in architecture, was one of the most likely to make his plan modern, to work in the direction of functionalism, and the rationality applied to clothes, like Corbusier wanted to do for buildings. This itinerary is in line with modernity as a plan for emancipation, that contributed to the image of a futuristic Courrèges (an image he worked on by creating

decors and clothes inspired by science fiction, or intersidereal spaces that needed to be conquered). But this aim and emancipating vision, this critical and strict approach to fashion, came up against the imperatives of fashion as being based on the new rather than the true, the wished for or the good. So, in the entry under Courrèges in the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, we can read: "The strict design stance of the designer did not enable him to incorporate, like so many designers of his generation, the influence of the "caftan" style or the exotic style that came into fashion with the hippy movement, or the "rustic" ecology that inspired a renewal in ready-to-wear at the beginning of the seventies. Faithful to his own image of confident serenity, André Courrèges persists in announcing the final victory of an effective and spare style, while women's fashion, as a whole in the seventies was moving towards the de-structuration of the garment under the influence of Japanese designers, or, denying "modern" values, to the "kitsch" or "retro" styles to be followed in the eighties by luxury baroque neo-romantic reminiscences, or very spicy exoticism". There exists in the fashion movement and in the excess, exclusivity and exclusion that supports it, a tendency toward the denial of the values that modernity and even more so modernism had brought.

So can fashion be situated on the side of post-modernity? Yes, most probably, if post-modernity is also defined by this crisis in criticism, a criticism that modernity had, on the contrary, carried at the same time as novelty value (but post modernity, while it is true that fashion is also that incessant and interrupted dialogue with the modern history it encompasses and on which it feeds retrospectively through the sedimentation effects we mentioned above, has to be seen according to the meaning given by Vattimo, after Heidegger, given to the word from the German *Verwindung*, or getting beyond what piously preserves the memory of the ancient order, rather than destroying it completely). For the rest, we can question the meaning of the cult of the ephemeral that exists in fashion, in a time governed by the breathtakingly quick expansion of recording and memory tech-

niques. It is also useful to remind ourselves that fashion also feeds off cinema, photography, and the ephemeral that it promotes as its most subversive value, as its main motor for permanent innovation and experimentation, is an ephemeral that will be long-term through archives, documents, all of the museum that accompanies its expansion through the development of mass media. So, in those terms, fashion, like the performing and ephemeral arts whose birth is contemporary with the popularisation of the video recording, and the expansions of techniques and institutions dedicated to the preservation and heritage of art, to the extent that archives and documents have become one of the major issues regarding current art. In this way also, fashion is postmodern, if postmodernism is a time marked by indecision of choices, the saturation of signs, by excessive name checking, and by the reign of simulacra and copies rather than that of the "originals", and by the conscience of the fact, as Boris Groys said more or less, that humans now know that they are two-legged museums.

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1. Walter Moser, *Mode-Moderne-Postmoderne*, *Etudes françaises*, 20, 2, 1984. ([www.erudit.org/revue/etudfr/1984/v20/n2/036826ar.pdf](http://www.erudit.org/revue/etudfr/1984/v20/n2/036826ar.pdf))
2. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition review, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

The concept of modernity is the subject of numerous theories that variably situate its birth, development and high point between the Renaissance and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At least all of the analysis tends to agree on the emergence of the individual, and aesthetic, social and political emancipation (thanks to the reason and power of scientific, technological or political rationality) as well as the importance of the present as a criteria for evaluation as opposed to the traditional. On the surface, fashion also presupposes the individual, a form of emancipation and a link with the present. If these three factors benefit fashion to make it the field of expression of modernity, must we then affirm that fashion and modernity are like two sides of the same coin, linked by the same progression and heading for the same destination? To what extent do fashion and modernity correspond to the same attitude?

An attitude, should we need reminding, is, first of all a way of holding one's body, a position that the animated being gives him or herself, through their own reactions, with no external constraints, in line with the model for modernity. An attitude is unlike a pose that is a momentary way of being, one that is forced, artificial, calculated, bizarre, far from one's usual countenance. Attitude is the position one gives the body through one's own spontaneous reaction, with no outer constraints, but also without any predominant determination or will. In addition, bearing, the way one holds oneself requires a value judgement (be it favourable or unfavourable) as bearing means

the way one holds oneself, dresses, behaves and not only the position of one's body; and as for the French term "allure" (aller), it is much closer to action than stillness. Attitude relies on a critical form of judgement. But a pose is an artificially adopted position with a view to obtaining a pre-determined result. A pose has no links with the rest of the elements, unlike attitude, and it is the result of an insidious game tied up with constraints. As a result, it is difficult for it to serve the objectives of modernity. So, is fashion an attitude, in which case it is definitely part of modernity or, on the contrary, is it a pose, a simulacra of modernity that would be its very negation?

### The starting gun

Fashion, by definition, is conjugated in the present. To question what is happening today is a process instated by Kant in philosophy. In as much as it is related to the present, the philosopher has the same preoccupations as the journalist. The specific nature of Kant's work was to propose a new way in which to relate to time, to the present. In Plato's Dialogue on politics, he presented all characters as if they regard their present to be an age of the world, without actually analysing the present for its own sake. Augustinian and Christian tradition take the same view: the present is but the beginning or the harbinger of an expected and hoped for future.

The question of modernity was posed in classical culture in two ways: it was either an authority to be accepted or rejected, or in the form of a comparison: are the Ancients preferable to the Moderns? Are we in a period of decadence? The question begins to be dealt with, not in relation to the ancients, but in relation to its own present. We must try to genealogically trace, not really the notion of modernity, but modernity as a question. However, the definition of the Enlightenment is negative in its own way, as a kind of exit, a split with the preceding state, that of an age of minority reason.

In What is enlightenment? Kant highlights the passage in his eyes of humanity from the state

of minority –as the incapacity to run itself morally and politically– to majority or adulthood, seen as a capacity to govern itself. The Enlightenment was not the moment when humankind suddenly became enlightened, free and liberated, but the movement through which the conditions became possible for the people to take a hold of themselves. By pointing out that laziness and cowardice are impediments to this adulthood, Kant affirms that no one can avoid the obligation of commanding oneself: it is impossible to escape one's own liberty. Attaining adulthood requires efforts; it mobilises moral values such as courage. So we must thus consider the Enlightenment as both a process carried out collectively by man and a personal act of courage. Man is both the element and the agent of the same process. In a comparable measure, fashion also relies on this dual individual and collective commitment.

In the commentary with the same title –What is enlightenment?– Michel Foucault proposes a definition of modernity that is not a historical sequence but an attitude: “Referring to Kant’s text, I wonder if we could not just envisage modernity as an attitude rather than a period of history. By attitude I mean a mode of relating to the present; a voluntary choice made by some; well, a way of thinking and feeling, a manner of acting and behaving also that, marks one’s belonging and presents itself as a task. A little, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an ethos. By consequence, rather than wanting to distinguish the “modern period” from the “pre” or “postmodern” eras, I believe it would be preferable to look at how the attitude of modernity, since it was formed, found itself fighting against attitudes of “counter modernity”<sup>1</sup>. What we refer to as modernity, instead of being a historical period, contains the possibility of a critical conception of the subject in virtue of its capacity to judge and its disposition to use its critical sense in the limits imposed by time.

Is fashion a modern field for possible experiences? Of course it is inseparable from the present; it demands a voluntary choice (for some); it is a way of acting, feeling and beha-

ving; it answers to an indeterminate plan, without any hope for realisation and achievement, due to the exhaustible character of trends and fashions. In this way, fashion is in line with the attitude of modernity. To be modern is to think of the present as a possible place for another type of idea and not respect it for what it is. This leads to the question: what are the possibilities and alternatives that fashion proposes? It would appear necessary to go back to Baudelaire when modernity leant on fashion.

### The epic character of fashion

In the 1846 salon<sup>2</sup>, Baudelaire stated an opinion in which “the decadence of painting” could be explained by “moral decadence”. For the most conservative among his contemporaries for whom the only art was that which conformed to tradition, one was obliged to avert one’s eyes from the present when it forgot to honour the Ancients. However, to be modern is to concentrate on the present. Modernity is not, strictly speaking, the absence of tradition but its lack of constitution in Baudelaire’s time. The classic injunction of “the grand tradition” came from the recurrent and common idealisation of the old life, the exaltation of warrior and virile values, the cult of glorious public behaviour. It also involved representation with emphasis on the magnificent, the sumptuous, the plenty, the great, linked to the exercise of political and military power. By contesting the “spectacular” character of tradition, Baudelaire aimed not so much to disqualify the spectacular but to re-deploy it, and its oscillating character, in more trivial manner (fashion, novelty, merchandise).

As for Balzac, in the *Traité de la vie élégante*, he examined the manifestations of ordinary sensibility. The interest he had in clothing was precisely this aesthetic transformation of the ordinary<sup>3</sup>. Instead of believing that the incongruous details of his character’s clothing were aimed at setting the scene for the character’s actions, it was more a question of making the clothing descriptions a process through which the garments depicted “the man and his time”<sup>4</sup>. The power of the significance of the

clothing went beyond its social and aesthetic value. For those who can “decode a costume”<sup>5</sup>, the morals and the society, the era and the morality, taste and sensibility are merely waiting to be exposed. Thus leading to the writer’s particular attention for all that could be referred to as the “social material”<sup>6</sup> or the “infinite smallness of material civilisation”<sup>7</sup>. The enterprise implies the description of the “accessories of existence”. How can beauty respond to an ideal that is chained in the banality of the quotidian? In order to answer this, it is necessary to observe how the aesthetic delimitation between the noble and the common became more and more porous.

In other words, how could modern heroism be characterised? It incarnated the figure of the dispossessed. The word of the hero was no longer inhabited by any feeling that would not be recognised by the public it was aimed at, just like the success of serial novels and fashion whose logic and growth speed were so fast that the public was their heroic heart. There was a parallel, a game of mirrors between the hero and his public. The hero becomes the real subject of modernity. While in Balzac, the gladiator became the travelling salesman, in Baudelaire the gladiator was to be found among the proletariat. What a worker does throughout the day was the equivalent of the exploits of the gladiators in other times. In the Salon of 1859, Baudelaire said: “As, when I hear of men such as Raphael and Veronese being praised to the heavens, with the visible intention of undermining what came after them, while giving my enthusiasm to these huge shadows that don’t need it, I wonder if merit, which is at least equal to theirs (let’s say for the moment, with pure complaisance that it is inferior), is not infinitely more deserving, when successfully developed in a hostile atmosphere and land?”<sup>8</sup>

In tradition, the beauty of the work depended on the degree of dignity of the subject. The beautiful and noble subjects, that mirrored glorious moral, political and military values, contributed directly to the execution of great works. There was a solidarity between the nature of the subject and the degree of beauty of its representation. The grand tradition

excluded the representation of ordinary subjects without grandeur. A position contested by Baudelaire: “... as to so love general beauty, that expressed by poets and classical artists, we are no less wrong to neglect particular beauty, that beauty of circumstance and the trace of morals”<sup>9</sup>. The consequences and principles of Baudelaire’s position led to a break in the unity between the subject and the manner in which it was represented. By virtue of this split, fashion, along with make-up and its ordinary manifestations, could be moved centre stage in aesthetic terms.

The lack of concordance between the subject and its mode of literary representation happened in Baudelaire. The era was ripe for interpretation through gestures, traits or the habits of a given individual. When the subject to be represented and the genre destined to represent it split, a new mode of organisation between the genre and its contents was established: the facts were juxtaposed without any radical organising hierarchy. It was the end of the artistic system in which the dignity of the subjects determined the genre of representation. Different degrees or types of taste were recognised without taking for granted the superiority of one over another, of the noble over the vile. In addition, the possibilities for negating the opposition between the superior and the inferior did not only precede the freedom to multiply the type of domain (fashion, design, cinema, photography, music) and to spread them to the masses, they made it possible. For example, for a technical process, like the cinema, to be qualified as an art, its subject must already be art<sup>10</sup>. This was the assumption of those who transformed photography into art rather than attempt to mimic painting as was the case with pictorialism<sup>11</sup>.

### The exegesis of the present

Modernity was characterised by the consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a split with tradition that reflected a search for the surprise effect, a renewal of impression, novelty, the headiness of what’s happening, the fleeting nature of emotion. This is what Baudelaire meant when he identified modernity with the

transitory, the fleeting and the fortuitous. At the same time, modernity was not just a sharper sensitivity to the fleeting present, it was above all a wish to “hero-ise” the present. However, the heroism of modern life did not offer itself up easily, it had to be captured, seized. In order to show that an era, according to Baudelaire, is no less fertile in epic motives, he defined it: modernity is not that which is immediately obvious, it is the essential activity of revealing it. It supposes an in-depth conversion: an attitude.

Baudelaire began with a hypothesis and moved on to a syllogism: given that all eras had their beauty, we must have ours. We must accept the hypothesis of the universality of beauty before even producing the proof of its existence. As such, we must presuppose that we do not yet know it. If beauty manifests itself in objects ignored by “the great tradition”, there is no less beauty in the most ordinary of things. He who can identify beauty in all of its diverse expressions is more modern than he who actually produces the beauty. He is the judge of his time while being confronted with the difficulty of evaluating his present. He must reflect on this meaning and the significance of the present in the present. He is not so much confronted with the present than that which is given to the present, in the name of the present, like the novelty of fashion. In this way, modernity is not so much linked to the flow of novelty than to the evaluation of everything that manifests itself simultaneously. As an example, Baudelaire mocks those painters who, finding the garments of 19<sup>th</sup> century men too ugly, only wished to paint ancient togas. However, modernity in painting should not introduce the black clothing of the time into painting. The modern painter should show this dark riding coat as the “necessary garment for our times”. Instead of exhibiting fashion in the manner of the fashion journals, he should be capable of showing, through this fashion, the essential, permanent, recurring relationship the era had with death. “The black garment and riding coat have, not only their own poetic beauty, which is the expression of universal equality, but the poetry of their expression of the public soul; an immense parade of under-

takers, politicians, lovers, bourgeois. We all celebrate some funerals”<sup>12</sup>. In order to designate this attitude of modernity, Baudelaire repeated, like a precept: “You have no right to be disdainful of the present”.

Baudelaire’s modernity came through the figure of the rag-picker who, like the modern poet, treats the rejects, the junk, who sorts them, classifies them and, in doing so, makes an “intelligent choice” according to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin pinpoints the issue of modernity through an attitude to “trash”: “An ambiguous light falls on the poetry of the apaches. Is the refuse of society the hero of the big city? Or is not the hero the poet who builds his work using this material?”<sup>13</sup> Modernity is not an elegy for change for the sake of change, but a higher knowledge of the uniqueness of the present moment that has something of the heroic. It is not a question of wandering in the present to collect curiosities, but to transfigure it by expressing its reality better than its own reality could.

This “hero-isation” is ironic. According to Michel Foucault, in the modern attitude, the passing moment must not be sacralised in order to maintain or perpetuate it, to collect it as a fleeting and interesting curiosity: this is what Baudelaire called a type of “flânerie”. This means opening one’s eyes, paying attention and collecting in the memory. Baudelaire sets the “Flâneur” up against the modern man: “He goes, he runs, he searches. Of course, this man, this solitary individual with an active imagination, constantly travelling through the desert of men, has a higher purpose than that of the pure flâneur, a more general aim, more than the fleeting pleasure of circumstance. He is searching for something that we can call modernity. He means to take from fashion what is poetic in the historical”<sup>14</sup>.

And, as an example of modernity, Baudelaire cites the painter Constantin Guys, who appears to be but a flâneur, a simple collector of curiosities. He remains “the last everywhere where one can enjoy light, feel poetry, experience life, vibrate to music, everywhere that passion can rest its gaze, everywhere where the natural man and the conventional man can

be seen with a bizarre beauty, everywhere where the sun shines on the quick joys of the depraved animal"<sup>15</sup>. Constantin Guys was not, however a flâneur. As proof, when the entire world went to sleep, he went to work, and he transfigured the real. A transfiguration that was not the annulment of the real, but a difficult game between the truth of the real and the exercise of freedom; "natural" things became "more than natural", "beautiful" things became "more than beautiful" and singular things appeared "to be endowed with an enthusiastic life like the soul of the artist". In the modern attitude, the high value of the present is inseparable from the determination to imagine it, to imagine it other than it is and to transform it, not by destroying it, but by capturing it as it is. Baudelarian modernity is an exercise where the extreme attention to the real is confronted with the practice of a freedom that both respects this reality and transgresses it.

How is it possible to evaluate the modern attitude correctly? All evaluation is carried out after the fact, with the delay that characterises modernity and its relationship with the present: "That all modernity deserves to become antiquity"<sup>16</sup>. When modernity sees its rights recognised, its time has passed. It is only once it is dead, demoted as such, that one can finally know if it is capable of becoming an antiquity. But antiquity merely supplies a model (logic, general method, pure art) in formal terms, as dynamics and inspiration are the work of modernity: "From examining it too closely, he loses the memory of the present; he abdicates the value and privileges supplied by circumstance"<sup>17</sup>.

### Modernity vs fashion

The question of fashion, of clothes systematically conjugated in the present, of the moment, seems to command the analyses of Baudelaire. The participation of fashion in modernity can be measured against the disqualification of nature, a negation that is operated in favour of artifice. Fashion is artificial and happily accompanies modernity through its radical opposition to nature. For Baudelaire, nature teaches us nothing, it

obliges man to eat, drink, sleep, abandoning him to an animal existence. Nature is but the voice of interest, unlike the religious and civilised word. Virtue is artificial, evil can be done with no effort. 'Fashion, Baudelaire wrote, must thus be considered as a symptom of taste and the ideal, on the surface of the human brain above all that that natural life accumulates in terms of the vulgar, the earthly, the vile, like a sublime deformation of nature, or even like the permanent and successive reformation of nature"<sup>18</sup>. One only needs to conclude with the parallels of fashion with modernity.

By stating that beauty is made of the conjuncture of the present –the here and now– and the eternal, of the particular and the absolute, Baudelaire created a crisis in the indivisible and ideal unity of beauty in its traditional form. In the "grand tradition", beauty should be eternal, the unison of the liberal arts, the mathematical perfection of nature at the Renaissance, of the capacity to extract itself from the contingent order to the era. Everything indicates that the beautiful does not belong to its era, to the present, but to tradition and posterity on condition that it has marked its inscription in the past. This is how "grand tradition" stands out from ephemeral expressions of beauty. Fashion thus can not escape relegation. Baudelaire worked for its rehabilitation, even its glorification.

There is beauty in particular things: fashion, dandyism, women, make-up, the ordinary character, low-life, prostitution, the spectacle of elegant life, the spectacle of criminals. If none of these manifestations are in themselves, modern, they become so when the eternal is extracted from the transitory, that is to say, literally revealed. The operation is necessary. However, nothing guarantees its success. In addition, the equivalence between modernity and fashion is debatable, even unacceptable.

Indeed, the modern attitude encourages us to refuse fashion. A rejection that is not for moral reasons but simply, to take things as they come, as they appear, as they are, is to go against the attitude that serves to justify modernity. That fashion relies on the accep-

tance of the flow of novelties can not be questioned, one can comply or refuse. Fashion is conjugated with a "presentness" that modernity must take into account without accepting unconditionally. It is not possible to subscribe to the present, even the most breath taking without evaluating it first. Everything that is in fashion is of the present.

Indeed, an essential distinction between the adoption by imitation of new fashions and the modern consciousness of fashion that contains perhaps –to be confirmed– a type of beauty. The first indicates a dependence, or a servitude that the second does not have in as much as it is situated in the critical terrain of evaluation: what is the value of what is presented today? The modern person reconsiders the things that present themselves without following them slavishly. Modernity is critical in essence. It is the judge of the present and takes shape by extracting the absolute from the particular. It is decisive, and this attitude decides whether the eternal is present in the transitory or not. The criticism can operate only on condition that it takes the transitory into account and to judge the transitory, having taken care to let it appear, without on the one hand, reducing it to a symptom of decadence, and on the other by excluding all complacency in relation to the transitory.

It is all around us and "we have only to open our eyes to know our own heroism". Is the beauty of the era so obvious? Opening our eyes is to operate by conversion, in virtue of modernity's own attitude, a complex, anachronistic attitude for most of Baudelaire's contemporaries. This is the issue at stake for modernity: to be able to open one's eyes. In reality, the affair is less about a cognitive capacity than a critical capacity. It is the determination shown by someone who engages with his present differently. The notion of engagement is central. As modernity is far from obvious and it is obtained by the transformation of our relationship with the present, it is a question of motivation, of refusal of passivity and flânerie. This is how criticism refers to an individual attitude that enables the aesthetic reception of work with the motivation to enter into moder-

nity. There can be no aesthetic appreciation of a work that does not engage the necessary qualities of criticism. Aesthetics suppose ethics. There is no criticism without the commitment of criticism and the critic. This is why Baudelaire noted: "Parisian life is full of marvellous and poetic subjects. We are surrounded by the marvellous and it sates us like the air; but we do not see it"<sup>19</sup>. This explains how hard it was to enter into modernity. The difficulties were all the more obvious as the print of the current on one's sensibility could mislead one to thinking we were already in the modern. Beauty is powerful in the transitory, nothing guarantees its flowering.

Evidence of this in the 1846 Salon was the idea that criticism was the essential condition for modernity becoming real, relying on very modern art of the selective reception of the pieces<sup>20</sup>. Without criticism, modernity as an act of inscription in one's era is illusory. The work can not be read without criticism. Separate de facto, they are inseparable in law from one another. Criticism is aesthetic in essence, it supplies the modernity of its means, that is to say the possibility to operate social change that can, collectively and individually, generalise the necessary and demanded commitment. Criticism is essential to modernity and is also political: while aiming for the common good, no politician can ignore his time. This fundamental point bears witness to the distance between Baudelaire and individualism not only in its bourgeois form as the valorisation of individual interests, but above all in relation to artistic individualism: "Individuality –that little property– ate collective originality; and, as was shown in a famous chapter of a romantic novel, that the book killed the monument, we could say that for the present it is the painter that has killed painting"<sup>21</sup>. In a regime commanded by individual creation, do we not risk the chaos of an exhausting and sterile freedom? A number of artists trying to stand out alienate themselves reproducing what only a few of the most original can produce. In a social art regime, the originality of solutions is collective, unlike the individual regime of production. The glorification of the individual according to Baudelaire,

leads to “doubt” and “poverty of invention”. Most people are incapable of individual originality, they must make do with borrowed originality. In the absence of a powerful collective style, the destiny of most artists is powerless imitation. They become the “mimics of art”. Instead of being subjected to domination by a master, they will undergo the domination of a much more powerful personality.

#### From the production of self to economic production

Dandyism, far from being a fashion avatar, stands out to the extent that it radicalises while also incarnating the execution of modernity. How can we explain that the dandy, on the surface a 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, could have existed, according to Baudelaire, in all eras, even in ancient Rome? So what is the modernity that is the preserve of Baudelaire’s Dandyism compared with historical Dandyism? A number of factors characterise it: the relationship with the era, its critical capacity, its manner of existing in its era by refusing the democratic avatars, its refusal of the conformist and plebeian character of fashion, its left-field manner of being. Dandyism can neither be reduced to its costume nor its mimics, nor can it be reduced to its body poses, it can be understood in terms of the attitude it weaves with its present through a style of existence. At the same time, this relationship with the present obviously relies on a necessity to invent oneself that calls for a choice of costumes and mimics, in other words, attitudes. The stylised and essentially inventive existence of the dandy dictates behaviour that is never vulgar (political regime), to combat triviality (social regime), to be proud (moral regime), to show self-discipline (ascetic regime).

How is the dandy evidence of an alternative to the anti modern character of fashion? Freed from the economic constraints that oblige him to produce the means for his existence, the dandy removes himself in his own way from the commercial era through the opposition he shows towards it, and his only other occupation is to maintain his own elegance. Dandyism is an “outlaw” institution that possesses its

own laws. It belongs to modernity through its capacity to produce a singular regime of existence: “These people have no other state than to cultivate the idea of beauty in their person, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think”<sup>22</sup>. Like a work of art, the life of the Dandy is fantasy put into action, by virtue, notably, of a disdain for the characteristic utility of economic production. If, on the one hand, in line with the norms of aristocratic existence, the dandy does not adhere to the bourgeois system of the accumulation of wealth; on the other, by virtue of his singularity, he who respects only his own laws, in the end defends individual interests comparable to those of bourgeois individualism.

The modern attitude designates a way of being of the subject and a certain manner of being visible to all, that can then be transposed into the costume, by one’s allure, by one’s way of walking. For this practice of liberty to take shape in an attitude that is beautiful, good, noble, honourable, memorable, one needs to work on oneself. This preoccupation with the self leads to self control and as a result to a preoccupation with others. To be modern, beyond the attention to the present, consists of a personal exercise of self-building by refusing what one is through simple social imitation. If the modern man is a sculptor of the self, he is obliged to be creative –the perimeter of which is not defined– which is not an easy task.

Modernity is not just a relationship with the present, it is also the relationship that one must establish with oneself. “To be modern, highlighted Michel Foucault, is to not accept oneself as one is in the flow of passing moments; it is to take oneself as the subject of a complex and difficult elaboration”<sup>23</sup>. He also refers to what Baudelaire calls “dandyism”, according to the vocabulary of the time. The notion of self invention involves, on the one hand, a criticism of nature as “vulgar, earthly, vile”; on the other, it calls for a revolt of man against himself. The “doctrine of elegance” imposes a discipline more despotic than the most terrible of religions on these “ambitious and humble sectarians”. The modern man is

not one that goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is searching to invent himself. This modernity does not free man in his own being; it obliges him to invent himself. Baudelaire did not conceive of this game of freedom with the real for his transfiguration, this ascetic elaboration of the self, taking place in society itself or in the political corps. Why can't it happen in another place called art? The analyses of Gabriel Tarde are essential on this point. The work of art is not an "artificial organ added to the individual; it is, if you'll excuse the expression, an artificial, imaginary mistress. It does not answer a need, but a love"<sup>24</sup>. In the aesthetic relationship, the link is not individual, it relies, on the contrary on the sharing of the relationship itself. While love between people turns to stone through selfishness and jealousy, sharing with another causes a moral pain, however, art produces even more joy as it touches more and more people. The artist adds "a new variety of sensations to the public's sensibility"<sup>25</sup>. Artists replace individual sensibility (uneducated, natural, variable and incommunicable) –seriously criticised by Baudelaire– by a collective sensibility. Thus, instead of only projecting desires and beliefs like in ancient times, the aesthetic matrix, that is typical of modernity, brings common sensations to the people. Science and religion carry out the socialisation of beliefs; the morals of the state take care of the socialisation of desires; and finally art takes care of the socialisation of pure feelings. It has the power to make individual, fleeting and elusive feelings "fall into the social community". Tarde announces nothing less than the framework of a political aesthetic; whose accomplishment relies on the articulation of a collective sensibility with individual sensibility. In addition, this government does not rely on the exercise of a power through an institution, in the traditional form of power, but on the capacity of each person to govern himself with the autonomy of judgement and aesthetic pleasure.

From this comes the hypothesis of a relationship between aesthetic self-government and the development of economic liberalism. Can we affirm that modernity, relayed by capitalism,

has made the dream of Saint Simonianism come true? That is to say an alliance of savants, industrials and artists; a schema in which the artist has a fundamental role; at the avant-garde of production. By expressing content, he contributes to the spread and vulgarisation of ideas in a particularly effective form. Indeed, art defines the political conditions of sharing in as much as it constitutes an effective means –socially and collectively– for the appreciation, evaluation and transformation of the life of the senses.

The basics of modernity, self-invention, which is aesthetic, supposes the cultivation and mobilisation of one's inventive strengths in work. And today, this point sends us back to the issue of maintaining the strength of invention that is constituted in human capital. Unlike the vision of political economy, it is not so much the time spent working that generates value, but the individual's power for immaterial invention. If creativity obviously blooms in art, then in the pure affirmation of itself and free of all repetition, a policy that could be termed modern, in the economic sense, is aesthetic in essence. It is above all in a liberal society that individuals are invited to produce themselves: everyone becoming a sort of company of self-production (of one's qualifications, skills and imagination). It is not so much a "consumer society" that unfolds but a society of enterprise where innovation is the result of innovation in human capital terms.

If for Baudelaire, modern man was one who tries to invent himself, the liberal possibility is in the background, as is the limited and critical wording in as much as a crisis in modernity is underway that signifies its negation. The enterprise of the active capture of the present of Baudelaire's modernity is replaced –without it being the totally replacement– by a fascination for all that is present, only present, and as a consequence, fashion and the consumable. However, modernity excludes the characteristic passivity of consumption. So, how did consumption manage to combine itself with modernity? Modernity was obliged to undergo slight movements that while there were discreet and hardly felt, have nonetheless been

decisive. The over-determination of modernity is the operation through which modernity is neutralised. In other words, it may have given up its power to judge, to decide, meaning its critical faculty.

But the modalities of this transformation must be examined. So the diversification of the types of beauty as opposed to the “grand tradition” gave rise to the possible abolition of aesthetic hierarchies. This is how nature was sacrificed to the glorification of all artificial productions. This is how the faculty of suggestion of a work gave rise to the inversion of the spectator/work relationship, and to the idea that the spectator is central; and that the work of art is but the neutral basis for a more essential experience. This is how the attention to the present led to the evaluation of all events as superior as long as they are marked with the seal of the current.

All possible transformations are explained by economic (liberalism), social (individualism) and intellectual (contestation of aesthetic hierarchies) reasons. From the moment that no artificial production can be excluded from the domain of the aesthetic, we don't have to mention that the production of merchandise can calmly capture the aesthetic assumption in the programme for modernity. This is how art –or should we speak of an aesthetic and consumable experience– constitutes the vector for the production, distribution and consumption of all objects. On this subject, in the interests of making merchandise desirable, according to Walter Benjamin, the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought “women, with no consideration” into the process of producing merchandise: “Baudelaire's enterprise entailed highlighting the aura of merchandise. He tries to humanise merchandise in a heroic manner. This attempt finds its counterpoint in the bourgeois attempt, at the same era, to humanise merchandise in a sentimental fashion: to give merchandise a home, like men”<sup>26</sup>. This passage continues: “These transformations consisted in the form-merchandise being manifested in the work of art, and the form –mass in its public”<sup>27</sup>. As an emblematic figure, the woman appeared in big cities in the figure of prostitution and that of

the mass article. Merchandise “celebrated its humanisation in the prostitute”<sup>28</sup>. Evidence of this is the travesty of individual expression in favour of a professional expression –the prostitute and the merchandise– which is done with make-up.

In the movement of modernity, fashion remains a manner in which to name a relationship with the current, its examination and the obligation of the subject to produce itself. The modern attitude is an attention to limits: the limits of the present, those that each person formulates for themselves and those of modernity. Once these limits have been passed, fashion is more of a modern pose than an attitude, less a practice of modernity than an attraction for its vocabulary. In as much as modernity is an attitude, its task is unfinished, in the margins of historical periods, and it can be brought up to date in different contexts, yesterday and today, whether it be pre-modernity or the precipitous sacrifice of modernity on the altar of post modernity.

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1. Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que les lumières ?*, available on the Internet: [http://foucault.info/documents/what\\_Is\\_Enlightenment/foucault.queestcequeLesLumieres.fr.html](http://foucault.info/documents/what_Is_Enlightenment/foucault.queestcequeLesLumieres.fr.html)
2. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *Œuvres complètes*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 689.
3. This question calls for a re-reading of Philippe Bruneau's preface to *Le vêtement chez Balzac. Extraits de la Comédie humaine*. Texts gathered by François Boucher, Paris, IFM/Regard, 2001.
4. Balzac, *Une ténébreuse affaire*, 1841, *La Comédie humaine*, Paris, Gallimard, bibliothèque de la Pléiade, t. VIII, 1976, p. 543-544.
5. *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, 1844, *ibid.*, t. VI, p. 523.
6. Balzac, *Un début dans la vie*, *ibid.*, t. I, p. 733.
7. *Les Employés*, *ibid.*, t. VII, p. 978.
8. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1859 », in *Œuvres complètes*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 746.
9. Baudelaire, « Le peintre de la vie moderne », in *Œuvres complètes*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 790
10. Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique*, La fabrique, Paris, 2000, p. 49.
11. « L'apparition des masses sur la scène de l'histoire ou dans les « nouvelles » images, ce n'est pas d'abord le lien entre l'âge des masses et celui de la science et de la technique. C'est d'abord la logique esthétique d'un mode de visibilité qui, d'une part révoque les échelles de grandeur de

la tradition représentative, d'autre part révoque le modèle oratoire de la parole au profit de la lecture des signes sur le corps des choses, des hommes et des sociétés ». (The apparition of the masses on the historical stage or in « new » images, is not first of all the link between the age of the masses and that of science and technology. It is above all the aesthetic logic of a mode of visibility that, on the one hand revokes the scales of grandeur of the representative tradition, and on the other revokes the oratory model of speaking in favour of reading signs on the bodies of things, men, and societies). Jacques Rancière, op. cit., p. 52.

12. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in (Œuvres complètes, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 688.

13. Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire. Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme, Paris, Payot, 2004, p. 117-118.

14. Baudelaire, « Le peintre de la vie moderne », in *ibid.*, p. 797.

15. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 798.

16. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 797.

17. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 797.

18. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 809.

19. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *ibid.*, p. 689.

20. Baudelaire, « A quoi bon la critique », in *ibid.*, p. 640.

21. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *ibid.*, p. 687.

22. Baudelaire, « Le peintre de la vie moderne », in *ibid.*, p. 806.

23. Michel Foucault, op. cit.

24. Tarde, *La Logique sociale*, Paris, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1999, p. 554.

25. Tarde, *ibid.*, p. 590.

26. Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 228.

27. Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 234.

28. Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 228.

The main question that comes to mind when we observe the links between clothing and modernity could be this: at what point in their history and after what process did clothes become modern? And a second: to what extent is our so called “modern” era also modern in terms of clothes, and in what way?

Before starting, we must specify what we mean by modern. Here, we will be referring to two definitions: on the one hand modernity as a historical period, that began at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and reached its peak in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and the other modernity meaning the combination of an ethic (the search for the relationship shape/function) and an aesthetics (the abandonment of the ornamental in favour of the visibility of the structure), an approach that can be found in the furniture and the utility object of the Early American Period (the 18<sup>th</sup> century popular American), and among certain French architects of the same period (Ledoux, Boullée, Lequeu) or in the Anglo-Saxon decorative art of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Biedermeier or Arts & Crafts). But we could also see it in the first gothic architecture (that was but the architectural expression of a technical wish, that of the reduction of weight carrying structures in favour of glass, just like the metallic architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) or in traditional Japanese houses. While this approach was totally absent during the Renaissance and the baroque era (both over-use ornaments) –as can be seen also in clothing from the 1400’s to about 1750– it is also important to mention the fact that what we refer to as modernity today is but a historical “periodisation” of an approach that did not always exist, but is far from limiting itself to the

20<sup>th</sup> century. So, the history of clothes can be linked in many ways to this dual notion of modernity: either the garment was “modern” in ancient times, as we will see or that it hasn’t always been in the modern era.

Around 1350, a major event occurred that historians refer to as “The cut of clothes”: men’s clothes became short and fitted while women’s clothing remained long and full, retaining the essential characteristics of the robe from late Antiquity that lasted, in different variations, throughout the Middle Ages. But what might appear as a mere aesthetic variation revealed a need, if not ethical then practical, that led to the massive adoption by men of short fitted clothing, and the doublet, that already existed as a functional garment as it was a padded item worn under armour to protect the body. Accompanying the cut of the garment, the doublet highlights a major evolutionary clothing event: the move from a technical garment to an everyday and/or appearance-based garment resulting in importance being given to function and structure. It was not by chance that another example of this slide occurred in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the riding coat slowly replaced French men’s clothing that had existed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century: a technical garment to begin with (reserved, obviously enough, for riding), the riding coat (or in French the “redingote”) obeyed the same principles: widespread shifting adoption through use of a garment that was both simple and functional, with obvious structure and, to begin with at least, not very ornamental. The British historian James Laver identified the phenomenon that changed a technical garment (and, as such, one reserved for a specific “social period”) to an everyday use, obeying an ethic –that we could refer to as “modernist”– in its search for simplicity, functionality and comfort, and the best example of which is probably jeans.

However, it was not until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that historical modernity gave these shifts a historical framework, which was often merely a *trompe-l’œil*. In effect, we often want to believe that modernity in clothing came from fashion and its official “authorities”,

designers. So we cite Poiret or Vionnet for freeing women from the corset when, in fact, it was often usage rather than design that led to the change. Proof of this is the attempts to impose a simplified and modern garment –from the bloomers created by Libby Miller in 1851 in the United States to the Rational Dress Movement that was founded in England in 1881, from the theorisation of the garment led by the constructivists (Popova or Rodtchenko) to the futuristic fashion of Cardin, Courrèges and Rabanne–, very few of which actually ended up in the wardrobes of their times. However, the major innovations – the real modernity of the garment– continued to occur through usage, the technical garment gradually passing into everyday use: jeans, again but also most of the major items in the contemporary wardrobe: trousers (sailor’s long trousers), jackets (from military clothing), the t-shirt (underwear becoming outerwear), the sweat suit, baseball cap and trainers (from sports), etc. Modernity in clothing, if we can refer to this notion, comes not so much from thought-out innovation but arises from one of the four main technical garment fields: work wear, military clothing, sportswear and underwear. This means that clothes only really evolve through their utilitarian edges, in places where they manage a conjunction between a search for effectiveness, whatever it may be, and technical progress –from the evolution of materials to tricks and cutting details. After all, the specific cross-over closing of the Perfecto biker’s jacket comes from the need to protect the upper half of the body on the motorbike. The rest, the way it is taken up by everyone, is a question of sociology –as all the innovations of the technical garment do not pass through to everyday clothes. A number of designers claim they would have liked to have invented jeans. The problem is, jeans weren’t invented, they were adopted by people for reasons that were more economic and cultural (that of the America of the thirties and forties when jeans went from being work wear to everyday wear) than for their pure “physical” qualities –as nearly all of the work wear in the West of the time, from the English docker’s trousers to that of French carpenter’s gear, could have ful-

filled the same functions and undergo the same evolution– only their evocative potential (the nuance is not to be underestimated) was different from that of jeans.

So, there is less modernity in garments themselves than in their use and, while on the subject, it is important to mention the other big component of modernity in 20<sup>th</sup> century clothing, one also linked to its use: the notion of a wardrobe. Here again, the official history and its own glorification by brands lead us to think that the notion of a wardrobe comes from the official “authorities of fashion: we take for granted that the notion of combining pieces in the contemporary wardrobe (in other words, a relative versatility in items that enables varied combinations, when until the twenties, clothes were designed according to the principle of a total outfit) was invented by Chanel and her famous suit. While Gabrielle Chanel did indeed do much for the promotion of this vision of the wardrobe, the (relative) versatility that she developed quite successfully from the fifties goes back, in fact, to the American wardrobe of the thirties and forties when, a more relaxed, mix and match silhouette began to appear on university campuses and in urban areas, again inspired by clothes from sport, that gave rise to the notion of separates and, more generally that of American Sportswear, made widely popular by the ready-to-wear of the forties and fifties led by designers from industry such as Claire McCardell.

So, to answer the two questions asked at the start of this article, it seems we can affirm that clothing, throughout history, has been less modernised due to theoretical concepts (as was the case in architecture and furniture) than as a follow on from a sociological movement that saw the adoption by the masses of a garment that was previously used for technical reasons only. This makes the modernisation of clothes quite specific: it operates on the edges and has never happened *ex nihilo* as it always relies on the re-use of a pre-existing but specific garment. As for architecture, the object or most equipment, modernisation is the fruit of invention; in fashion it is more the fruit of

adoption – that is often slower than one might think (the invention of mechanically knitted fabric dates back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was employed in making underwear at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was adopted for outer garments in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). The modernisation of clothing, if not its modernity, is the result of unpredictable acts of adoption that have more to do with sociology (and economics) than with technological thought or aesthetic projection. It also, without a doubt, has something to do with social upheaval (be it demographic, political or economic) and the acts of individuation it leads to under the influence of new entrants and new social situations. The cutting of clothing in the 1350's corresponds exactly to the epidemic of the black plague of 1348 that upset the demography and sociology of the entire continent of Europe. On the other hand, the principles that still rule "modern" menswear were built at the same time as the social and economic mutations of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the de-structuring of the contemporary suit was accelerated by the shock of the Second World War.

Thus, and to finish, clothing has been modern for longer than we tend to think and at the same time remarkably archaic in some ways: do we realise that the blind button on the inside of a suit is a throwback to the turn-down collar of the riding coat? Or that the ring on the belt of a raincoat was originally for hanging hand grenades during the First World War? Or that what is seen on the runway each season is not as new as it seems and that fashion, a recycling organism, progresses thanks to the people that wear it (and more democratically also) rather than the people that make it?

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The ambiguous nature of the relationship between art, and more so fashion and modernity was mentioned by the poet Charles Baudelaire in an 1859 essay entitled *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (The modern painter). Fashion reflects the appearance of a given moment, “its morals”, its passions”, an appearance in which the observer can grasp the invariable “eternal element”, or, in other words, a poetic manner in which to manufacture the permanent from the ephemeral. Modernity goes hand in hand with the urbanisation and industrialisation that modify a number of space-time elements such as speed, mobility and communication. This paradigm shift was analysed by a number of European sociologists at the turn of the century. Emile Durkheim analysed the division of work in modern production process, Max Weber, the mechanism of disenchantment in a rationalised world, Ferdinand Tönnies, the mutation of the individual with, as a corollary, the rise in individualism.

Baudelaire wrote his essay before the birth of Haute Couture. The first “griffe” or signature came from Charles Frédéric Worth in 1871, sewn into a designed garment. The economic strength of the sector that grew during the period from the turn of the century to the twenties forced buyers into a demanding seasonal schedule. The creation of the *Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne*, in December 1910, went hand in hand with unique debates in particular on the nature of fashion. The artist opposed the “*vêtement de création*” (designed garment) with the “*reforming garment*”. Controversial from the start, the “*vêtement d’artiste*” was invented to stand against fashion whose industrialisation was

then transforming economic structures. Thus the Italian futuristic artists and Robert and Sonia Delaunay actively participated in this reform<sup>1</sup>. The Delaunays were married in 1910 and the following year, according to Sonia, “I had the idea to make a blanket for my newborn son from pieces of fabric as I had seen among Russian peasants. When it was finished, the way the fragments of fabric were distributed seem quite cubist to me and so we began trying to apply the process to other objects and paintings”<sup>2</sup>. It was in 1913 that Sonia Delaunay created the famous simultaneous dress described by Blaise Cendrars as follows: “It was no longer merely a piece of fabric draped according to the current fashion but a composition seen as an object, like a living painting, a sculpture on a living form”<sup>3</sup>. So he wrote the poem “*Sur la robe elle a un corps*” that was published in 1916 in the catalogue of Robert and Sonia Delaunay’s work in Stockholm, then in 1919 in the collection entitled “*Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*”. An article by the university lecturer Carrie Noland entitled “*High Decoration: Sonia Delaunay, Blaise Cendrars, and the Poem as Fashion Design*”<sup>4</sup> contains new analysis we can refer to on the subject. We note that the Delaunays reinterpreted depth as the illusion coming from a flat coloured surface rather than the result of a perspective point. The surface of this new universe, with nothing underneath, becomes primordial; where art meets fashion, it encourages exchange and contact that was to condition the cosmic experience. Later, Sonia Delaunay reminds us that “the fashion of the day was of no interest to us. I was not looking to innovate in terms of cut, but to brighten and animate the art of clothes by reusing new materials that brought new colour ranges”<sup>5</sup>. Taking existing things as a starting point, she selected, cut, applied, assembled, juxtaposed, sewed... Her method was a forerunner to what Walter Benjamin described in his famous text: “I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuable, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse –these I will not inventory but allow in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them”<sup>6</sup>. Just like the historian, the artist-

designer mutates into a modern “rag-picker” looking for scraps. The metaphor shows well-known processes such as collage and montage that were already common in contemporary painting, photography, cinema and literature, to invent the narrative of a radical contemporary story that tears fragments of images from their context and founds a modern sensibility on this destruction.

In our 1996 publication *Quand l’art habillait le vêtement* (When art dressed clothes) that was subsequently translated into German and enriched by the exhibition entitled *Kunstler ziehen an, Avantgardemode in Europa 1910 bis 1939* at the Museum am Ostwall in Dortmund, in 1998, we analysed how to “peripheral” clothing creations from all over Europe had spread the double-edged wish to free clothes from fashion, in other words from one geographical origin: Paris, on the one hand, and from a temporal cycle: the seasons, on the other. To do so, the organisation of creative activity can be split into two aspects. In Germany, Russia, or Switzerland, artists considered their craft or industrial work to be complementary to their teaching at the Bauhaus the Vkhoutemas or, for Sophie Taeuber, at the Ecole des Arts appliqués in Zurich. As a result, the production from workshops, from the Soviet manufactures or even the Italian “case d’arte”, new experimental laboratories, went hand in hand with theoretical, technical (class programmes, patents, clothing typology in Eastern Europe) or poetic (manifestoes in Italy mainly) reflection.

This unusual perspective of Paris that had been, not without reason, consecrated the fashion capital since the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the discovery of the textile and clothing design of avant-garde European artists. Some, immigrants in Paris, were obliged to earn a living rapidly. In Italy and Russia, these artists had contributed to the emergence of a national couture or clothing industry and their arrival in the capital, which revealed itself to be without a great consequence for the creation of Haute Couture, incite us to highlight the extraordinary welcome and friendship that Madeleine Vionnet, Gabrielle Chanel, Marie Cuttoli, Director of the Salon Myrbor gave to Thayaht,

Iliazd, Gontcharova, or the level of solidarity between immigrant artists, Sonia Delaunay with Iliazd and Mansoureff, Iliazd with Mansoureff..

To put into perspective a split with utopian, or at least theoretical clothing conceptions developed in one’s native country and an enforced adoption of the Paris fashion world, let us remember that continuity of an artistic activity within the strict framework of craft-based structures like workshops or dress-making facilities, enabled the pursuit of other activities (painting, writing...).

In Paris it is not surprising that the “émigré artist” was hired by the “great designer” who thus revealed their artistic sensibility. Certain famous designer/artist “couples” come to mind such as Paul Poiret and Raoul Dufy, Jeanne Lanvin and Armand Rateau, Madeleine Vionnet and Thayaht<sup>7</sup>, Gabrielle Chanel and Russian artists or even Schiaparelli and Dali. Often begun for a ballet, a play, an exhibition or a party, their collaboration in fact presented very diverse aspects. It served the complex and often dark desire of the designer to endow fashion with an artistic value by filling it with the spirit of the contemporary aesthetic movement. The creative inventiveness of the historical European avant-gardes remains to be evoked through the few examples that follow. The clothing of the artists is passed on to us through numerous photographic portraits. Colouring the face seems to have been a practice from early on. Already in 1871, Rimbaud, in his famous letter known as “du Voyant” wrote: “Imagine a man planting and cultivating warts on his face. I say one has to be visible, to be seen”. In 1910, colouring one’s skin became a performance. At the same time the Russian artists Zdanévitch, Larionov and Gontcharova practiced body painting: “We will daub ourselves for a moment and any change in our feelings will change our daubing, like a painting absorbs another painting, like the way we can see other windows through a car window, all superimposed on one another”. Their faces were transformed “in the emotion projector”<sup>8</sup>. The Italian Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), founder of the futurist movement in 1909, exhorted people to try the “psychofolie”

experiment that involved applying colours to the body so as to modify the collective sensibility. He demanded that the singers dye their hair green, their arms purple, their décolletage sky blue and their chignon orange.

In a comparative vein, his compatriot Giacomo Balla (1871-1958) proposed a polychrome accessory he referred to as a “modifier”. A fabric application made with cut pieces of fabric, the modifier could be placed “when you want where you want on any part of your clothing using pneumatic buttons. Each person can thus not only modify but invent a new garment at any moment that reflects his humour. The modifier can be imperious, in love, caressing, persuasive, diplomatic, multitonal, shocking, discordant, decisive, scented, etc.”. (Manifesto of the futuristic garment, May 20<sup>th</sup> 1914). Thus, before World War One, artists taking over the domain of the senses, engaged their own bodies in a synesthetic experiment, following the example of an emotional short-circuit that, like coloured hearing, would bring together perceptions from different origins. After the war and in a context of the “return to order”, photographic portraits showed artists in work clothes, that of manual workers. The Florentine artist Ernesto Thyaht, who had an American mother was the first to propose a sort of boiler suit, the “tuta” in 1919, this was not by chance. The design of the tuta was like American overalls. The term overall is a generic one that designates the different outfits worn by workers, dungarees, boiler suits, jackets with many pockets. Thyaht described the garment in an alliterative quatrain: “en forme de T ; elle est Toute d’une pièce ; elle habille Toute la personne ; elle est pour Tous” (In the shape of a T ; it is all in one piece, it dresses all of a person, it is for all). Around this time, the Viennese artist Adolf Loos was also predicting a universal destiny for the man in overalls. In the USSR, the constructivists Vladimir Tatline, Alexandre Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova between 1922 and 1924 invented a new wardrobe made up of an overcoat, a production suit and sailor’s clothes. Varvara Stepanova exalted the vision of stitches made on the machine: “What gives the garment its shape are these essential stitches. I would say it is

important to show the stitches, the staples... leave them exposed like in a machine. Finish with invisible hand stitches, replace them with the line of machine stitches” (Lef, “Front gauche de l’art”, 2, n° 23). In 1926, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, then teaching at the Bauhaus was photographed “in the garments of the workers of modern industry”. He wore the work clothes of a fisherman, elevated by the artist to the level of design worthy of Bauhaus, in line with the Russian movement.

The principle of the working garment is to show the truth of its cut by patch pockets, hems, patches and obvious stitches on bands of cut leather. The garment shows its functional and mechanical workings. Thus the “appearance” is there to “serve the truth”<sup>9</sup>. In the Sixties, the modernity of the designs of Paco Rabanne or André Courrèges also claim a link to the truth.

“Materials are what artists have at their disposal: what is presented to them in words, colours, and sounds, to associations of all kinds, as far as the different technological processes developed”<sup>10</sup>. Theodor Adorno thus gave rise to fertile reflection on the “concept of materials” that appeared at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in 1912, the futurists Gino Severini and Carlo Carra proposed the integration of the five senses in the perception of a work of art. The garment had a mission to free all of the possibilities, colour, light, noise, mobility and smell. Giacomo Balla wore triangular shaped ties facing up or down in fabric, cardboard or celluloid. One of them, that no longer exists was equipped with a little bulb that the artist would switch on in an electrifying part of the conversation!

After the First World War, futurism entered a second period that went on until the thirties. Artists continued to refer to the machine, notably to the car and above all the plane, a theme that had its own development in “aeropeinture”. With the rise in fascism, the movement took on a political nature. Marinetti published *Futurismo e Fascismo* in 1924. The artists who favoured a militant nationalism in favour of Italian art participated in governmental actions encouraging the development of national

industrial and crafts based companies. The use of different “new” materials, like straw, aluminium and lanital was then encouraged.

As part of a national campaign for the straw hat, in 1928, the Florentine artist Thayah designed a series of functional hats. Aluminium was the subject of a manifesto by the sculptor Renato de Bosso in 1932 in tandem with the poet Ignazio Scurto. The sculptor tells the story that after having visited an aluminium factory in Rovereto he had the idea to create a little plaque in the shape of a plane to wear as a tie. “The anti-tie we have designed can be: in white iron with horizontal curves, in opaque aluminium with anti-traditional decorative motifs; in shiny aluminium with modern incisions; in simple chromed metal; in aluminium with gradations of shininess and opacity; in precious metal; in brass; in copper. The metals used must be two to four millimetres thick and thus have a minimum corresponding weight and the knot must be totally abolished. The length is a few centimetres (...) The anti-tie, held by a light elastic collar, reflects all the sun and azure that we, Italians possess in great quantities and takes away the melancholic and pessimistic note in our men”.<sup>11</sup> In Pistoia, Victor Aldo de Sanctis, made metal breastplates and filed patents for four hats, in straw, felt and celluloid and a pair of rubber and aluminium shoes (First national fashion exhibition in Turin, April 12<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> 1933). In Italy again, lanital was certainly the most unusual material of the time. It was an artificial fibre made from the casein from milk commercialised by Snia Viscosa, and was the subject of an apologia written by Marinetti, *Il poema del vestito di latte Parole in liberta futuriste/Lanital omaggio della Snia viscosa* (a poem for milk clothes, words in free futurist/Lanital homage to the Snia Viscosa) in 1937. The page layout was by Bruno Munari, and the iconography showed pastoral, industrial and finally military images.

In the German Bauhaus workshops however, the use of shiny viscose, then transparent cellophane (see-through cellulose) and the spread of the zipper in plastic or metal, opened promising perspectives. These materials and new technological procedures undeniably

changes the perception of the object and the garment that then became “dynamised”. Retractable furniture, moving paths, revolving doors, stairwells with elevators, auto-restaurants, clothes with removable pieces, etc. marked a new stage in the evolution of material culture. The object became functional, active, closely linked to man’s practical life”<sup>12</sup>, following new concepts of mobility and multiplicity.

The experimental creation of the historical avant-gardes, remained on the edges but wore the face of modernity that revealed (and woke up) bodily sensations. Taking the side of a critical dimension, it aimed to highlight as much as possible its own conditions of conception, thus valorising the creative process. The textile, garment and accessory creator thus attempted to explore the fashion medium in terms of its properties and its materials and through this process creates another temporality. The linear time was succeeded by “cycles and clusters of images”. The English novelist D.H. Lawrence added that “the idea of time as a continuous straight line cruelly paralysed our consciousness” (*Apocalypse*, 1932). However peripheral it may have been, this polyphonic creation will have left a trace as the broadening of fashion’s horizon, and that of the designer, to sensible forms of expression that may at first glance have seemed foreign.

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1. Giovanni Lista, « La mode futuriste », in *Europe*, 1910-1939, *Quand l’art habillait le vêtement*, Valérie Guillaume (dir.), Paris, Paris-Musées, 1997, p. 22-43.
2. Michel Hoog, Robert et Sonia Delaunay. *Musée national d’art moderne. Inventaire des collections publiques françaises*, Paris, Editions des Musées Nationaux, 1967, p. 122, quotes the review *XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1956, p. 19.
3. G. Bernier et M. Schneider-Maunoury, Robert et Sonia Delaunay, Paris, J.-C Lattès, 1995, p. 138.
4. *Journal X*, vol. 2, n° 2, printemps 1998, available on the site [www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/pubs/jx/2\\_2/noland.htm](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/pubs/jx/2_2/noland.htm)
5. *Nous irons jusqu’au soleil*, Robert Laffont, 1978, p. 36.
6. Walter Benjamin, *Le Livre des passages*. Paris Capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, « Réflexions théoriques sur la connaissance », Paris, éditions du Cerf, 1993, p. 476.
7. See the exhibition: *Thayah, un artista alle origini del Made in Italy*, Prato, Museo del tessuto, 15 December 2007-14 April 2008.

8. Michel Larionov, Manifestes, commentaires de Gabriella di Milia, Paris, Allia, 1995, « Pourquoi nous nous peinturlurons » (1913) p. 35-37.
9. Theodor W Adorno (1903-1969), founding member of the Frankfurt school. Théorie esthétique, Paralipomena, Paris, Klincksieck, 1995, p. 439 et 388.
10. Theodor W Adorno, *ibid.*, p. 209.
11. Manifesto futurista sulla cravatta italiana, Verona, March 1933.
12. B. Arvatov, « Organizatsiia byta », Almanach Proletkoulta, Moscou, 1925, p. 81, cited by John E. Bowlt, in "Un ingénieur vaut mieux qu'un millier d'esthètes. Réflexion sur les origines du constructivisme soviétique". Ligeia, April-September, n° 5-6, p. 44.

To talk of modernity implies that we try to define it as a concept: "Modernity designates the political and philosophical movement of the last three centuries of Western history. It was inherited from Christian metaphysics and can be split into five main converging processes: individualisation through the destruction of the old communities, "massification" through the adoption of standardised behaviour and lifestyles, the undermining of the sacred nature of the great religious narratives having been replaced by a scientific interpretation of the world, rationalisation due to the domination of instrumental reason through trade and technical effectiveness, globalisation through the worldwide extension of a model of society that is implicitly set up as the only rational and, as such, superior possibility."<sup>1</sup>

If modernity is linked to sociological, political or historical notions, it designates above all a movement that opposes tradition. It is a thought process that implies constant forward movement, the search for new ideas, new forms of expression, and innovation. Modernity supposes a vector-based timeframe in the direction of the future. It implies a favourable judgement on the present and the future and a negative one on the past. Modernity as an idea also exists in everyday reality. It has spread from the west over the past three centuries thanks to science, its technical application and economic development. The still unrealised project supposes that society is heading to a final accomplishment, each new fashion constituting an improvement which pushes back the frontiers of human limits. However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its genocides, massacres, world wars, totalitarianism and ecological disasters has rendered most of these principles obsolete. While man has indeed benefited from material development thanks

to technological advances, it has led to a poverty of mind. In effect, the technological development generated by reason and science has muted into new moral, social and economic dependencies. The mass media would appear to have taken on the function of mythology and religion regulator. The language of advertising now comes before all social languages. As early as 1970, in *La Société de consommation*<sup>2</sup>, Jean Baudrillard highlighted this mass phenomenon that gave consumption a leading role in society. It is in this context of consumption that we can envisage one social component: clothes fashion, the spread of which is closely linked to the media, to pictures and as such, fashion magazines.

To what extent have fashion magazines been the partners of modernity? Did they contribute to the end of modernity at the dawn of a new millennium? Did they enable women (the main readership) to stand out or, on the contrary to blend in with the masses? These questions need to be examined on an individual level as well as a collective one. Fashion, as we know it in the West since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is, by definition, in constant mutation. Changes can happen faster in fashion than in any other human activity. Fashion is a visible indicator of modernity as it follows a logic of evolution, adapting itself to the needs, life styles and tastes of each era. More particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when fashion went hand in hand with industrialisation and the creation of new needs. The drop in the cost of clothes as well as new means of distribution (department stores, transport, advertising) made fashion accessible to most social categories. We should, however, express reservations as to the benefits of the spread of fashion; in effect, for some, the frenetic rhythm of fashion leads naturally to waste as consumers are incited through pressure from the media to buy the superfluous. Nevertheless, clothes do carry modernity. On the one hand, an aspect of progress incarnated by fashion is its practicality. Clothes have been adapted to working women, or have been re-thought for the leisure activities and sport that became accessible with social advances. On the other hand, taking into account that modernity is synony-

mous with individualisation, then fashion, with its diversity presents the possibility for individual affirmation within a society. To dress oneself is to reveal oneself to others. From a sociological point of view, personality develops according to a certain model fixed by society. No society can exist without the individuals that make it but it survives itself and hands down its civilisation through individuals. This is where fashion takes on a real importance as it is the result of social behavioural patterns as much as it defines them. For example, the sixties were marked by a demand for freedom: women wore miniskirts and knee-high boots, at the same time, these outfits participated in their demands. By choosing to show their bodies and making themselves attractive, they affirmed their sexuality. They used fashion for social progress, whether it was for abortion legislation or the pill. In return, this dress style became a symbol of the sixties. So, as pointed out by Frédéric Monneyron in *La Frivolité essentielle*<sup>3</sup>, change in social behaviour is intrinsically linked to the evolution of fashion. What fashion has that is modern is that it participates in the construction of a society whose evolution it accelerates through its ephemeral character. By calling the previous fashion into question every time, and, as such, previous behaviour, fashion invites individuals to change their way of life and re-think their present. And what more effective means of spreading all of these new clothes and talking to women about their lives than women's magazines?

How have fashion magazines changed? In order to understand the issues surrounding these magazines it is important to consider them in the light of the evolution of the women's press of which they are the *avant-garde*. It was at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in France, that women's press appeared for the first time. It consisted of literary and society periodicals with a few papers reporting on the fight for emancipation but was essentially made up of fashion magazines. A dozen titles such as *La Mode miniature féminine illustrée*, *La Mode de Paris*, *L'Illustrateur des Dames*, *La Mode Universelle*, *La Mode pour tous* were very successful. They notably coincided with the

invention of haute couture by Worth in 1858, and were encouraged by the law on the freedom of the press in 1881. The presentation of fashion spreads in these magazines were essentially in the form of advertising and supplied the demand for new things among their society lady readers. From the start, these magazines represented modernity as they were part of a new mode of distribution, of innovation in dress and technological and political progress.

As well as the luxury fashion magazines reserved for a relatively wealthy public such as *L'Art de la Mode*, and the feminist press that supported women's liberation, this was the time when a more popular and practical press emerged. *Le Petit écho de la Mode* was set up to satisfy more family-based needs with the start of industrial civilisation and the development of education. In the same way, *Modes et Travaux*, established in 1919, positioned itself as a family magazine that supplied general advice in sewing, cooking and domestic life aimed at the average housewife.

But, in the same way that the department stores took their inspiration from haute couture, the high quality luxury magazines remained the reference in terms of fashion. *Vogue*, the American magazine published its first edition in 1892. It began as a small weekly publication established by Arthur Baldwin Turnure who wished to create a society magazine that nevertheless left room for prose and poetry. It spread rapidly to the rest of the world, to Great Britain in 1916, then to France in 1921. The editorial line of the magazine, that had by then gone monthly, was from the start concentrated on luxury fashion and high society. The back catalogue displays the evolution of the aesthetic and social changes in fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the work of the world's greatest fashion photographers and illustrators by highlighting the importance of international phenomena. As a result, it constitutes an excellent historical document as it follows the evolution of the "canons" of beauty: from the "garçonne" of the twenties to the "porno chic" of the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its success conferred it with a paradoxical position: it was

directive and elitist as it remained the “bible” for luxury ready-to-wear clients, it remained modern as it showed –or even created– the latest trends. In the thirties, for example, new activities and sporting leisure pursuits for women called for more suitable clothes. So, as Chanel inaugurated the fashion for tanning, with bodies free to move in jersey outfits, the artistic director at Vogue asked the photographers for photos of women in trousers or in “pyjama de plage” (beachwear).

If we consider that accessibility is one of the components of modernity, the magazine Marie-Claire established in 1939 by Jean Prouvost was a true revolution. In tandem with the growth in the cosmetic industry, the magazine tried an audacious compromise between the luxury of Vogue and the more popular magazines. Open to American influences, it proposed a vision of fashion that was not only clothes-based but also aesthetic. It also supported women’s liberation and the promotion of women within society. After the Second World War, the American model became the guide. In 1945, with a push from Hélène Gordon-Lazareff – an ex-editor of Marie-Claire who worked for Harper’s Bazaar during the war –the publishing house “Défense de la France” established Elle. It was the first magazine to have colour advertising. In fact, women in the sixties and the first half of the seventies acquired the status they demanded and the main battles were fought. In France, the right to vote for women in 1944 led to a series of social advances. On a more personal level, contraception was legalised in 1967 by the Neurwirth law and abortion in 1974 by the Veil law. From a family point of view, the law on parental authority gave men and women the same rights within the family in 1970, and in 1975 a law on divorce by mutual consent was passed. From a professional point of view, the reform of matrimonial regimes in 1965 enabled women to work without permission from their husbands and to benefit from social cover; and even though it was not yet properly enforced, the principle of equal pay for equal work “theoretically” was instated in 1972.

As mistress of the house, wife, mother, worker, women of the time no longer saw themselves

represented by the press available. This disaffection was the result of their status changing too quickly in relation to the conservatism of the press. The magazines available seemed to be out of synch with a modernity that took them by surprise, long before they had a chance to integrate the idea of the active woman or the progression of ready-to-wear and supermarket chains. In effect, in fashion, the sixties marked a huge sea change. The economic boom and the expansion of American culture, the freedom in morals and social upheaval led to huge upheaval in terms of economic and social norms. After the decade of penury that marked the after-war years, France entered a period known as the “Trente Glorieuses” (the boom years), where buying power increased notably. A multiplicity of new players entered the scene, in particular the “youth”, whose place in society grew constantly until it became a social and cultural reality. They bought the latest consumer products in fashion and identified with their singing or acting idols. Fashion became the keystone of the collective lives of the under-25’s. Until then fashion traditionally had to bow to the haute couture “diktat” and there was no specific fashion for young people. But, by rejecting the codified and strict world run by adults, this generation put an end to the sophisticated models and the traditional clothes she wore. In addition, from the beginning of the sixties, the spread of mass production, the appearance of new types of textiles and the ready-to-wear boom led to a revolution in the market. Fashion became more accessible. It affirmed its position with better means at its disposal and faster methods than in previous decades. The futuristic fashion launched by Cardin and Courrèges was significant at the time, just as the fashion from the streets inspired designers. Fashion became the expression of one’s chosen lifestyle that gave pride of place to youth and freedom. Clothes, as consumer durables, then became objects of mass consumption with a short life cycle. And, all of the innovations were spread by the media and advertising. The wealthy woman was no longer the only consumer. The average housewife was interested in a more accessible fashion and

young women became the potential readers of the women's press. In order to bring fashion magazines back into favour, they attempted diversification at the start of the eighties, as there were two trends: a need to become more accessible while remaining faithful to certain values of fashion. They also adopted a much faster reading mode. Marie Claire renewed its readership by proposing supplements with more personal themes (work, divorce, contraception...). Even though it remained essentially a fashion magazine, these changes enabled it to attract more readers, but they remained mainly well-off, educated professional women.

During the same period, Elle magazine developed more and more "fashion and beauty" columns, and an opening notebook that dealt with current affairs, show business and celebrities. Thanks to its success, Elle became the third biggest advertiser after the news weeklies L'Express and the Nouvel Observateur. This was because the main readership of Elle was made up of faithful consumers: women that were financially independent with serious purchasing power.

Whether it was in Elle or Marie-Claire "femininity" made its big comeback in the press. As the claims for equality had been met, the women's press went back to its initial function: singing the praises of being a woman. Fashion magazines thus remodelled themselves giving over pages to show-business and celebrity lifestyles, who were also serious fashion vehicles. From then on, fashion was to take another turn, it was no longer the preserve of a social elite, in as much as it was imposed by show-biz stars. Fashion magazines thus proposed another model for imitation, that of a young attractive, active woman, taken by surprise by the photographer going about her daily life.

The history of the feminine press up until today shows to what extent it has been a parallel with changes in mentalities and lifestyles. In the beginning they were simple fashion journals that diversified while retaining fashion as their basic business. While the press did experience difficulties in the sixties –due, as we

have seen, to the rapid evolution in lifestyles and the appearance of new players–, it was given an opportunity to reinvent itself to satisfy the expectations of modernity. But a number of signs lead us to examine the limits of fashion magazines in terms of modernity.

A first statement is on form. Indeed, if fashion evolves, the way in which items are presented in fashion magazines changes also. The expression of concepts in a certain way such as the review entails a choice of font, photo, framing, the way the space and the blanks are used. All of this influences the reaction of the reader, making them ripe to appreciate and buy the articles presented. We could also expect, with the changes brought by fashion, that these representations would be just as innovative. In addition, thanks to multimedia, the technology of perception of media has changed without that being reflected in the magazines. But, when we flick through Elle or Marie Claire, the fashion articles are often academically constructed. While modernity, we have seen, is a refusal to conform to tradition, the form of these magazines remains quite conventional. No creativity or innovation that would call the previous period into question. Since their creation, the presentation of articles remains essentially the same. The typography alternates bold and normal type facing. So, it reflects one of the characteristics of fashion that leaves only two choices, follow it or not. Traditional page layouts leave only a little blank. Their typography never places the magazine at the forefront of graphic design. We can no doubt give the simple explanation of economics, as simplicity and visual sobriety constitute a reassuring life-raft in times of trouble for high level fashion and purchasing power. The form of magazines thus contradicts the emancipating role they have taken on. On the contrary, the traditional and ordered presentation gives a feeling of generalised repetition. Fashion magazines are perfect for advertising as they have an immensely seductive power. How can one ignore the fact that despite the titles, its apparent variety, its interest in social current affairs, that women's press has, above all, three functions: seduction, entertainment and consumption? When large

numbers of women are turning away from newspapers and magazines, the women's press manages to maximise its profits thanks to advertisers. Women's magazines and even more so, fashion magazines are not on the side of women, but at the entire disposal of their main clients: advertisers. And the advertisers are interested in women in terms of magazine sales. They are looking for women who flick through without reading, retaining just the images and the messages of the big fashion, luxury or cosmetic brands. While the concept of modernity aims for the intellectual accomplishment of man, this mode of access to information has the opposite effect, to render readers passive.

We now understand one of the limits of modernity. Fashion magazines bear witness to our entering the "postmodern" age that is no longer attached to an idea of progress. The current fad for celebrity magazines, a new form of fashion magazine that satisfies the reader's curiosity is perhaps due to the fact that other magazines were no longer fulfilling that need. By compartmentalising different worlds: readers on the one hand, stars on the other, it leaves no ambiguity as to the role of each, while still proposing fashion to be consumed, but in a less direct manner.

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1. Charles Champetier, Alain de Benoist, « Manifeste : la Nouvelle Droite de l'an 2000 », in *Éléments*, n° 94, February 1999.
2. Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de consommation, ses mythes, ses structures*, Paris, Denoël, 1970.
3. Frédéric Monneyron, *La Frivolité essentielle. Du vêtement et de la mode*, Paris, PUF, 2001.

If we give credit to Roland Barthes' comment that "fashion is what goes out of fashion", we are forced to come to the conclusion that postmodernism is definitely not in fashion, due to the simple fact that the term, first used by Jean François Lyotard at the start of the seventies never ceases to ...not go out of fashion. But, how can it enlighten us on the idea of fashion, even the fashion object? The term, brought into vogue by architects, originally designated a commercial –even populist– style that succeeded the great era of modern architecture from Le Corbusier to Wright. This undulating notion that appears in the respective but not necessarily synonymous forms of "postmodern", "postmodernity", and "postmodernism" became to characterise the dominant culture of our times and the mental horizon in which we evolve. Whether we speak of postmodern, surmodern, or hypermodern, the question is essentially a new decentralised logic organising the production system that is like a second cultural skin for capitalism.

This logic is most notably founded on the implosion of the space-time system, a new form of syncretism that mixes pluralist and eclectic logic and an age of signs that enable the coexistence of many genres as opposed to the styles that reign over mass culture<sup>1</sup>. From a strictly fashion point of view, it seems that four recurring characteristics of the postmodern are of particular interest: (1) a depthlessness, a sort of new superficiality that spreads naturally in a new culture of image and simulacra, (2) the appearance of a new form of private temporality, whose resolutely schizophrenic nature determines new types of syntax or syntagmatic relations in the domain of the most temporal arts and (3) a new, fundamental type of emotional tonality, that Jameson refers to as intensities and is characterised notably by

figures of excess, an overabundance of events, spatial overabundance. To which we may add (4) a regime of individualisation of references<sup>2</sup> that blows up the very idea of culture as a closed and fictional symbolic universe enabling mutual recognition via a group of shared codes. These four angles help us to outline the fashion object. The question of emotional tonality for example poses the question of the fashion effect that has resolutely decided to play the intense card thus placing itself in a rhetoric of emphasis and, as such, of excess. We could thus say of fashion what the philosopher Clément Rosset affirms about marketing, that it "aims to give objects that are all reproducible and standard, a coefficient of difference that imposes them on the attention and seems, in advance, to present them favourably to the public"<sup>3</sup>.

The fashion object aims for a sort of domain of the superfluous that does not define itself as real but as a supplement to the real, with the idea of being "not like the rest" and "extra". This intensity brings up the question of superficiality and the lack of depth in the fashion object, whose effect is too often flatly result-based; it is generally spectacular and theatrical, it can appear artificial, as when it looks for effects, in music or in poetry, or when we speak of a "bel effet" (nice effect in the sense that the effect is both too theatrical and technical). However the postmodern relies more and more on emphasis as the socio-cultural coordinates lose focus. Taking Marc Augé's idea of "non-lieux"<sup>4</sup>, we could propose a fashion non-object that would be neither historical, nor identity-based nor relational. This is where the question of the individualisation of references comes into play. As shown by Frederic Jameson in *Le Postmodernisme ou la logique culturelle du capitalisme tardif*<sup>5</sup>, the postmodern is linked to the discrediting of literature whose aesthetics has started to lose some of its prestige and in general the discredit of works and their guardians or at least the evanescence of their aura. This evanescence leaves behind a central category deprived of all of its institutional, aesthetic and moral armour that once gave it depth and gravity. The postmodern has replaced the "work" (œuvre) and the attached

categories of author, intentionality, context, depth, style or even expression by the "text". However, as Michel Foucault showed us in his famous conference entitled "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?"<sup>6</sup>, the notion of a "work" is that it can be assigned to an "author" whose name refers to a particular individual, with a unique biography, and that, from reading it, it is legitimate to produce another discourse, known as a "commentaire". But, by replacing the work by the text, these three operations are no longer that clear or immediate, in the same way that it becomes difficult to speak of the "function" of the auteur. As a cultural dominant, the postmodern generalises the category of the text about anything and, as such, breaks the paradigm of the work that is part of modernity and presupposes interiority, the depth of subjectivity that expresses this interiority in a style that can itself be parodied. The postmodern empties and flattens these terms by combining in one paradigm, not the work but text, flow, surface, fragment, intensity, code and pastiche.<sup>7</sup>

This has had two major consequences, the first of which is that the idea of fashion as a cultural and thus collective narrative had to be replaced by the idea of fashion as an individual text. In other words, it is not clear that it would be possible today to rewrite a *Système de la Mode*, as Roland Barthes did using current fashion writing. In his seminal text, Jean-François Lyotard rightly defined the postmodern condition as the "death of the great narratives"<sup>8</sup>. Once fashion becomes totally appropriable by the individual, how can it still produce a collective narrative? We must thus take the postmodern to be the deconstructing of the cultural meta-system that is fashion. In his work on the semiotic analysis of fashion, Roland Barthes showed how men make sense of their garments: "the production of meaning, he says, is subject to certain constraints: this means that the constraints do not limit meaning but, on the contrary make it; meaning can not be created where freedom is total or non-existent: the regime of meaning is that of freedom under surveillance"<sup>9</sup>. In clothing, constraints can be of two kinds; "they can involve the terms of the variant, independently from the support it affects (the assertion of

existence, can include only the pure alternative of being or non-being): it is the systematic constraints; they can also cover the association of types and variants: in which case they are syntagmatic constraints"<sup>10</sup>. So the constraints are first at the level of the system, then on the level of the syntagm. But, doesn't the postmodern signal the crisis of the syntagm by the change in perspective and weakening of the paradigm? We could have thought that the postmodern signals a fashion system that is a huge game of "bricolage" (Do it yourself) in which each person digs into the system of signs and "vestemes", to use Barthes' term, would then organise a micro-system within a codified and signed universe. We would then be in a logic of "arts de faire", so expertly analysed by Michel de Certeau that enables one to oppose imposed behaviour and products and the "massification" and uniformity that characterises the advance of capitalism.<sup>11</sup> Of course we can defend, along with Michel de Certeau, the conviction of a creativity hidden in the confusion of the silent and effective ruses with which each person invents their "own way in which to travel through the forest of imposed products". The fashion object would only exist once it had been built by an individual capable of adapting it away from its basic function and appropriating the object. Identity-based "bricolage" is an obvious practice in consumption. Of course in *La Pensée sauvage* Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced the term "bricolage" to refer to the multiple processes through which individuals originally combine pre-constrained products at the centre of a new space. "Bricolage" implies a measure of misappropriation that enables one to give things other functions, and also involves gathering together various pre-existing objects using a combinatory creativity of arrangements and reshuffles. The "bricoleur" uses "whatever is to hand" and concocts his project using a finite and constrained group of heteroclit materials and tools. It is a question of reorganising the functional value of each element to create a consonance with the object. This uncertainty enables the opening of a 'jeu/je' (game/I) space in which the individual will be able to work out a system that works for him.

But can the essentially “mythopoetic” character of “bricolage” be found in the postmodern, individual re-appropriation of fashion objects? It is a pity that fashion characterised as such is not, like bricolage, a “muthos”, that is to say a practice that refers to a narrative trajectory (it happens in time), but implies a “faire” (make) through which the individual manufactures an anthropological object using disparate but nevertheless codified elements. So the bricoleur uses elements that are already “semi-particularised”, that is to say from elements that are, by nature, limited to a “precise and determined use”; the whole point of the bricolage consists of using this half-constraint as a freedom, by reorganising the functional value of each of the elements by the definition of new relations between the elements of the system at his disposal. We could almost say that the work of the bricoleur is quasi-structuralistic as it essentially involves relations and not elements. However, when bricolage involves the creation of a meaningful object by the significant reorganisation of the relations between pre-constrained elements, the manipulation of fashion objects in a postmodern logic seems more like a gesticulation, a dance of signs that leads to the neutralisation of signs. From the point at which freedom in garments is not under surveillance, but becomes total, and that the individual picks and mixes styles according to needs and circumstance, it is no longer possible to talk of “systematic productivity”, of alternative or polar, combined or anomic opposites that characterise the fashion system in Barthes. As such, fashion can hardly be thought of as a system in the broad sense of the term, as an ensemble of unities, functions and constraints.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the postmodern, no longer obeying the constraints of the syntagm and suggesting paradigmatic choices that aim often for pastiche and self-deprecation, affects the capacity of fashion from being an individual and/or cultural narrative.

This is where the second consequence of the postmodern appears: its fundamental “unrepresentability” that it imposes on the very idea of fashion. According to Jameson, the postmodern destroys the notion of distance (due to the shrinking of space) and notably the critical

distance in a universe without change in which everything is melted and “unrepresentable”. A passage from the work illustrates the avatars of the postmodern conscience in the “degraded landscape of junk and kitsch” that now constitutes its home. Jameson relates the effect on the consciousness of a visit to the *hôtel Bonaventure*, built in 1977 and symbol of postmodern architecture. Describing the hidden entrances, the glass elevators that go through the glass roof, the atrium full of banners, the range of shops as far as the panoramic revolving bar where the town “makes images of itself”, he shows how the building makes it impossible for the visitor to “locate himself”. However, the fashion object is well and truly at the heart of the very idea of representation, a major theoretical advance in western thought that consists of delimiting an object in order to make it visible and recognisable. However, the postmodern signals the arrival of a form of individual appropriation of the fashion object that doesn’t make any sense within a collective but gives rise to strategies of syncretism that are personal. Society no longer lets itself be understood by the observation of fashion objects that are more and more diffracted. Here we are touching on the question of unrepresentation that is, for Jameson, one of the fundamental characteristics of postmodernism and characterises a sort of grand present of a reality that exists only as a simulacra of itself where old styles and genres superimpose themselves in no particular order. This gives rise to a poverty of fashion that, due to its own unrepresentability, cannot find itself in the hijacking of a pre-existing system due to the absence of constraints, nor permit itself the identity-based bricolage and the uniqueness that results from it due to the semantic poverty of the fashion object resulting from an entropic polyphony without a score.

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1. These elements were highlighted in an article then a book that brought postmodernism to the fore: Charles Jenks, *What is postmodernism?*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Academy Editions, 1996 (1<sup>st</sup> edition: 1985).

2. Marc Augé, *Non lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris, Seuil, 1992.
3. Clément Rosset, *L'Objet singulier*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1979, p. 44.
4. Marc Augé, *ibid.*
5. Published in 1984 in the form of an article before becoming a book translated into French for the first time in the « D'art en questions » collection from the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Paris, 2007.
6. A conference dating from 1969 and published in *Dits et Ecrits*, I, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 819-837.
7. Thierry Labica, « Le grand récit de la postmodernité », in *La revue internationale des livres & des idées*, n° 1, septembre-octobre 2007, p. 39.
8. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1972.
9. Roland Barthes, *Système de la Mode*, 1967, réédition Points-Seuil, 1983, p. 168
10. *Ibidem.*
11. Michel de Certeau, *Les Arts de faire, L'invention du quotidien III, habiter, cuisiner*, Gallimard, Folio, 1994.
12. Roland Barthes, *ibid.*, note 1, p. 169.

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