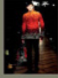

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Fashion as Art; is Fashion Art?

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Abstract

The question whether fashion can be regarded as a form of art begs the question of what kinds of things can legitimately be thus regarded.

In the first section, some of the most recent contributions to dealing with this issue are critically analyzed. The conclusion that emerges is that—like art—clothes can provide the subject of historical research. The second section deals with the aesthetics of clothes. If sartorial fashion can be a form of art then we need an aesthetics of fashion. Whilst it would be difficult to contest the artistic quality of clothes throughout the centuries, fashion—like architecture—fulfills primarily

a functional dimension. Some of the key concepts pertaining to classical aesthetics, such as taste in the writings of Edmund Burke, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, and Immanuel Kant with special reference to Kant's less well-known writings on anthropology under which he classified fashion, are discussed. Some of the more recent contributions such as Curt J. Ducasse's brilliant 1944 article "The Art of Personal Beauty" are also discussed in this section. Finally, Karen Hanson in her article "Dressing Up, Dressing Down: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion" addresses this important issue, arguing that—like dance perhaps—fashion has systematically been disregarded by philosophers as a worthy subject of research. Like so many articles in *Fashion Theory*, this article is an attempt to redress this balance by seeking new ways of providing a serious theoretical and aesthetic basis for the study of sartorial fashion.

KEYWORDS: aesthetics, taste, purposiveness without purpose, adornment, cosmetics

A span of almost a decade separates Sung Bok Kim's article entitled "Is Fashion Art?" (*Fashion Theory* 2(1): 51–72) from my article but our choice of title is an indication of a sameness of interest. At this point, however, all similarities end because the articles differ both in their "aims and objectives" as well as choice of methodology. In her impressively researched article, Sung Bok Kim's intention was to address the paucity of "theoretical arguments or criticism within the fashion world" and her aim was to "initiate the development of a critical approach to fashion by arguing the relationship between fashion and art."

Coming from a background of philosophy and history of art, I too address the relationship between fashion and art but the very fact that I effected an effortless transition from my areas of expertise to fashion found unexpected confirmation in Richard Martin's statement—quoted by Sung Bok Kim—that he has "never made a sufficient distinction between the two." It sums up my own position.

My points of departure are classical aesthetics with specific focus on Immanuel Kant and the philosophy of art and I have reached a similar conclusion albeit via a very different route. I hope that this important debate will continue to attract the serious scholarship it deserves.

Introduction

Two separate but related issues emerge from the title: (a) can it be legitimately argued that fashion is a form of art, and if so (b) can we enlist the help of aesthetics to elucidate the peculiar nature of so controversial a form of art?

The first question, which pertains to the philosophy of art, will be dealt with by analyzing the nature of definitions as well as the

appropriateness of applying a logical definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions to a fuzzy concept such as art. The influential theory of the "art world," which presupposes a shift from the object to the putative relational nature of the definition of art—if we are to have such a definition at all—will also be discussed.

The second question will move from the philosophy of art to aesthetics to deal with the nature of the aesthetic experience, including a survey of the emergence of the concept of taste in British empiricist philosophy during the eighteenth century. Special emphasis will be placed on the concepts of "disinterestedness" as well as Immanuel Kant's "purposiveness without purpose" as satisfactory explanations of how we might be allowed to have an aesthetic experience of sartorial fashion in spite of the functional dimension predicated of clothes.

The status of sartorial fashion as a legitimate form of art remains a hotly debated issue although a survey of the most influential writers on this subject seems to favor the conferring upon it the status of art.

Anne Hollander considers axiomatic that "dress is a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visible self as its medium" (Hollander 1993: 311) and this statement becomes the premise in Elizabeth Wilson's book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, the aim of which is to explore fashion as "a cultural phenomenon, as an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society" (Wilson 1985: 3).

The origins of the "art world" theory can be found in Kant's writings on anthropology in which society is the necessary context for fashion, which will be discussed later. A more recent example of a practical application of the theory is provided by the notorious cover of the February 1982 issue of *Artforum*, featuring an Issey Miyake outfit which doubled "as sculpture, as painting and as aggressive and erotic spectacle" (Townsend 2002: 59). This bold transgression marked the beginning of a succession of events and publications attempting to bridge the gap perceived to exist between the worlds of art and fashion culminating in the 1996 extravaganza that was the Florence Biennale. Its objective, espoused in the opening paragraph in the acknowledgments section of the massive catalog entitled "Il Tempo é la moda" written by its organizer Luigi Settembrini, was to "confront at the highest level—by using the interdisciplinary method and in the form of an international cultural festival—some of the issues central to our contemporary experience. The objective of the seven exhibitions in the Biennale was to explore the contiguity, affinity, reciprocal influences and the creative relationship between the universe of the fashion and visual arts: design, architecture, film, photography, music, costume and communication, in the belief that within the universe of our common sensibilities fashion in its complex and innovative worth is one of the most popular and significant expressions of mass culture but one of the most undervalued" (Catalogue of the Biennale di Firenze 1996).

Beyond the rhetoric, however, its covert purpose was to provide the much-needed institutionalized context for conferring art status upon sartorial fashion, but the result was a monumental flop.

(a) Fashion as Art

Providing a logical definition of art in terms of the necessary and sufficient conditions required to categorize something under the heading art has been central in the philosophy of art. Noël Carroll provides a comprehensive "contemporary introduction" to this problem by defining art in terms of key concepts such as representation, expression, formal qualities, aesthetics, and finally the influential "institutional theory" he traces to George Dickie's 1970s writings in which he provided just such a logical definition of art. No mean task, especially in the light of twentieth-century avant-garde developments, whereby canonical definitions were challenged by Marcel Duchamp's mischievous games with categories. Dickie provides a historical framework grounded in the Greek concept of *mimesis* through to Ludwig Wittgenstein's contention that instead of looking for logical definitions we should establish "family resemblances" between the discrete art entities. Dickie concludes, rather unflatteringly, that "the parade of dreary and superficial definitions that had been presented was for a variety of reasons eminently rejectable." Instead, apart from the self-explanatory quality of art-factuality here considered as a necessary but not sufficient condition, we need to consider the relational nature of our definition of art, which presupposes its institutionalization: "a work of art in the classificatory sense is 1. an artefact, 2. a set of the aspects of which has been conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain institution (the art world)" (Dickie 1992: 438). Thus, a new concept, namely the "art world" is postulated for the sole purpose of conferring upon artifacts the status of "art." Duchamp must have been aware of this simple fact, for when he placed his urinal in just such a context at the *Independents* exhibition in New York in 1917 it fixed its status: it was art! Dickie observes that Duchamp therefore engaged in a hitherto "unnoticed and unappreciated" human act, namely the "conferring of the status of art; they simply used an existing institutional device in an unusual way. Duchamp did not invent the art world, because it was there all along" (Dickie 1992: 438). The conclusion is that "the Institutional Theory of Art" may sound like saying: "a work of art is an object of which someone has said I christen this object a work of art. And it is rather like that, although this does not mean that the conferring of the status of art is a simple matter" (Dickie 1992: 442).

If we accept Dickie's hypothesis there should be no problem regarding the process of "conferring of the status of art" on sartorial fashion,

and Elsa Schiaparelli is a well-known case in point. However, as Dickie points out, the process is not so simple after all.

A recent objection comes from Noël Carroll, who, whilst admitting that "Institutional Theories of Art are very comprehensive," states that they do not answer "pressing questions" such as: "must all art emerge from a pre-existing network of social relations? Does it appear to be informative? Does it depend upon stretching the notions of social institutions, social practices, and social relationships beyond the breaking point?" (Carroll 1999: 239). We may well ask ourselves if the "Institutional Theory of Art," whilst providing the necessary sociocultural context, does not address issues specifically related to the art object.

Another theory, which like the "Institutional Theory" offers only a partial definition, was proposed by Arthur Danto. Art is defined in terms of its historical and theoretical framework – that is, its institutionalization is accomplished at an abstract level. Thus what differentiates Andy Warhol's Brillo cartons from those made by the manufacturer is not some sort of intrinsic value: "what in the end marks the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of *is* other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without the theory one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the art-world, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting" (Danto 1998: 41).

Elsewhere, Carroll refers to a "Historical Definition of Art" proposed by Jerold Levinson, according to which "something is an artwork if it is intended to support some well precedented art regard." This self-explanatory definition is particularly relevant to this debate because—as Carroll points out—"it connects candidates to the history of art" (Carroll 1999: 241). It sums up the arguments in favor as follows: "the Historical Definition of Art maintains that it is a necessary condition of art that it be underwritten by a certain intention on the part of its creator: one intention to proffer the artefact for some acknowledged art regard. The opponent of the Historical Definition denies that such intentions are always necessary. Sometimes the mere fact that an artefact can be used to serve a historically acknowledged function suffices to call an object art, irrespective of the original creator's intention" (Carroll 1999: 249). Thus, the issue at stake is that of intention versus function, acknowledged as a "profound one."

Both the "Institutional Theory of Art" and the "Historical Definition of Art" are proved inconclusive. Another definition is called for, and the method chosen to tackle the problem is procedural: what do we do when in doubt regarding the artistic status of objects such as Duchamp's "ready-mades" or Warhol's "Brillo Boxes?" The solution hinges on the

self-reflective nature of twentieth-century art and "a great deal of art has been dedicated to addressing the question of the nature of art" (Carroll 1999: 259). In the case of the "Brillo Boxes" the question "what is art?" is here addressed in "a particularly penetrating way, asking of itself what makes this object an artwork when its indiscernible counterparts, everyday Brillo boxes—are not artworks? Warhol's 'Brillo Box' thus addressed an antecedently acknowledged, ongoing art-world concern in a creative way by focussing the reflexive art-world question 'What is Art?' in a canny and strikingly perspicuous manner, reframing and redirecting it as the question: 'What makes art-works different from real things?'" (Carroll 1999: 253).

The answer is to provide a "historical narrative." Such an approach to classifying artworks "establishes the art status of a candidate by connecting the work in question to previously acknowledged artworks and practices. In this regard, it may appear to recall the family resemblance approach" (Carroll 1999: 256). Both the "Institutional Theory of Art" and the "Historical Definition of Art" as definitions are subject to the pitfalls of circularity, which is not the case with narratives. Moreover, Carroll privileges the method of "historical narration" for a simple reason: all the famous theories of art, "including the representational theory of art, the expression theory, formalism, and aesthetic theories of art—have been wrecked by the appearance of avant-garde innovations. Compared to these approaches, the method of historical narration has nothing to fear from the avant-garde; as a procedure for identifying art it is well tailored to incorporating the mutations of the avant-garde into the continuous evolution of art" (Carroll 1999: 264). Historical narration emerges, therefore, as the preferred classificatory tool and method for dealing with modern and contemporary developments.

Acquiring the appropriate methodology is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success, and in this instance one reason is to do with the nature of histories of art and fashion.

Providing a history of art presupposes a clear and distinct idea of what kind of things this is a history of, and whilst it could be argued that its subject matter is as old as the human endeavor to create art, this is not true of art history as an academic discipline. Once this distinction is established it can be stated that, differing methodologies notwithstanding, we have a historiography of art history that emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century with the pioneering writings of Jacob Burkhardt, Heinrich Wölfflin, Bernard Berenson, Joseph Crowe, and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle. Legitimizing art history as an academic discipline provides also the justification for a "historical definition of art," establishing it as a valid approach. The study of clothes from a historical perspective is an even more recent endeavor and, therefore, it has not yet acquired a status equal to that of the fine arts; this may well have something to do with the perceived lower status of craft. Nevertheless, the historical study of clothes is

inextricably linked to and dependent on that of visual art for a simple reason: their perishable nature. For the art historian, clothes provide important clues regarding issues of class, gender, social status, etc. as well as conveyors of meaning in iconographical studies. To date art historians have regarded their material primarily as historical documents that happen also to be art rather than the other way round. If we turn to clothes, the analogy works at one level, but we are still left with the aesthetic dimension.

(b) Is Fashion Art?

The second section of the article will attempt to construe an aesthetics of sartorial fashion. This issue has been addressed in an original way by Anne Hollander in her analysis of the relationship between painted and "real life" clothes in Western European history and she rightly points out that to consider the aesthetics of dress "from the point of view of economic or political history, or the history of technology, or even of social customs, with which it is so closely allied, may be very illuminating on the question of how such matters affect symbolic invention in clothing. But to do only this is to limit dress to the status of an elevated craft." This would align fashion with "pottery, tapestry or furnishings" whereas it deserves "a more serious kind of attention" and to that effect, clothing should be on equal footing with architecture, whose functional dimension did not preclude its well-entrenched artistic status (Hollander 1993: 14).

It is nevertheless puzzling that the uncontested artistic quality of clothes throughout the centuries has not yet placed them on an equal footing with architecture. One of the reasons is that whilst architecture has unequivocally been perceived as a heroic endeavor worthy of the label art, not least because of the monumental expenses involved, connotations of frivolity continue to overshadow attempts at treating sartorial fashion as a subject worthy of serious academic research.

We start with Immanuel Kant's harsh words against fashion, whose classification under the unflattering headings of vanity and folly go a long way towards confirming the above.

A key concept that dominated eighteenth-century aesthetics was that of the "feeling of pleasure and displeasure," in other words, personal avowals of taste, and Kant was no exception in postulating a distinction between *a posteriori* (empirical) and *a priori* aesthetic judgments, whereby our feelings of pleasure/displeasure determine the aesthetic judgment in the former but is determined by it in the latter. Such a pure (*a priori*) aesthetic pleasure is caused, unlike the impure sensuous pleasure, by the harmonious intercourse between our faculties of the imagination and the understanding.

Anthropology from a Pragmatic Viewpoint consists of the lectures in anthropology Kant gave between 1772 and 1795; "he began writing the book only after he was certain that it would not compete with his lectures" (Cerf in Kant 1963). The book was very likely written in 1796/7 and first published in Köningsberg in 1798. In it, he moved away from the central preoccupation of establishing the *a priori* grounds of the judgment of taste. Nor is he concerned with ascriptions of avowals of the kind "I like/dislike X;" rather, his interest is lodged "somewhere in between these extremes, which articulate what is considered good taste by some society" (Cerf in Kant 1963: 131). Within this framework fashion is relegated to social custom rather than aesthetics, here defined as an imitation of the others, specifically of "more important persons" as, for example, the child would imitate grownups and members of the lower class people of rank and so on ... Man is naturally inclined to compare himself in his conduct with more important persons in order not "to appear of lower status than others and this in matters, moreover, where no consideration is given to usefulness. A law of such imitation is called fashion." The frivolous nature of this kind of imitation provides the justification for predicating vanity and folly of fashion: "thus fashion belongs under the heading of vanity for its intent is of no inner value; and also under the heading of folly, for it is folly to be compelled by mere example into following slavishly the conduct shown us by many in society" (Kant 1963: 71).

Characteristically, Kant presents us with an antinomy: (a) to keep in fashion is a matter of taste; (b) fashion itself "is not really a matter of taste (for it can be extremely tasteless)." This is resolved as follows: "it is better to be a fool within fashion than out of it, if one really wishes to call this vanity by the harsh name of folly" and because "all fashions are already by definition changeable ways of living" keeping up with change is tantamount to keeping in fashion.

The "feeling of pleasure and displeasure" is here replaced by vanity—that is, not of liking or disliking, but misplaced affectation in the mindless imitation of those considered socially superior. It could be argued that by postulating that society provides the framework that makes fashion possible, Kant anticipates in a way the "Institutional Theory of Art" not for art, which is transcendental, but for fashion, which is relational.

The relational nature of taste was developed by Edmund Burke, whose pivotal book *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* was first published in 1757, the same year as Hume's equally influential *Of the Standard of Taste*, which would have been familiar to Kant. This is confirmed by Kant's oddly elitist reference to the sublime at the end of his passage on fashion: "Something sublime which is at the same time beautiful, has splendour (for instance, a resplendent, starred sky or, if this does not sound too lowly, a church like St. Peter's in Rome), and splendour can be brought together with the true ideal taste, pomp, however, is bragging and spectacular ostentation, and though it may be joined with taste, will

meet resistance from it. For pomp is meant for the great mass of people, which contains much rabble, and the rabble's taste is dull and depends more on sensation than on judgement" (Kant 1963: 72).

In the *Enquiry* Edmund Burke divides passions into self-preservation and society, the latter further divided into the society of sexes for "the purpose of propagation" and general society. Passions in general society are complex and Burke distinguishes three ways in which members in society link: sympathy, imitation, and ambition. It appears that Kant's definition of fashion as upward imitation incorporates Burke's own definition of imitation, whilst its pejorative connotations would also incorporate ambition.

Our desire to imitate, argues Burke, is crucial in society given that "this forms our manners, our opinions, our lives. It is one of the strongest links in society; it is a species of mutual compliance which all men yield to each other without constraint to themselves, and which is extremely flattering to them" (Burke 1990: 45).

Kant's definition of fashion is a special kind of imitation, which rather than being a "species of mutual compliance" is a matter of vanity, approximating Burke's concept of ambition, which can be pleasurable when "excelling his fellows in something deemed valuable amongst them," but equally if we cannot distinguish ourselves by something excellent "we begin to take complacency in some singular infirmities, follies or defects of one kind or another" (Burke 1990: 46).

Kant predicates vanity and folly of fashion, here defined as imitation (Kant 1963: 71).There seems to be little difference between Burke's "complacency in some singular infirmities," of which folly is one, resulting from misplaced ambition, and Kant's notion of slavish imitation of conduct in society, also deemed as folly, given that in both instances we are presented with asymmetrical statements of the kind "X is nothing but Y," which are reductionist (Nozick 1990: 627). In this case they debunk ambition and imitation to "complacency in follies" and "mindless imitation," respectively.

Taste as a special faculty enabling us to evaluate aesthetic qualities such as the beautiful and the sublime played a seminal part in eighteenth-century thought when aesthetics emerged as an independent branch of philosophy. The conjunctive nature of the aesthetic experience as subjective and claiming inter-subjective validity has baffled philosophers who have endeavored to solve the apparent paradox in a number of ways. The British Empiricists have paid particular attention to the notion of taste, starting with the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. In his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* first published in 1711, he postulates an "inward eye" he called "moral sense" which doubled as "ethical" when applied to actions and dispositions and "aesthetic" when applied to nature and art (Beardsley 1966: 179–83). Shaftesbury's "inward eye" was subsequently replaced by "taste," defined as a capacity for our unmediated response to "feelings of pleasure and displeasure."

The two important essays dealing with "taste" by David Hume and Edmund Burke, referred to earlier, were both published in 1757. Hume's argument hinges on the fact that beauty is not a quality in objects but a psychological response triggered by interacting with them. Our responses are subjective and therefore wildly different; nevertheless, "it appears, then, that amidst all the variety and caprice of taste there are certain general principles of approbation or blame" (Hume 2005: 493). There is consensus with regard to excellence, although, Hume concedes, that as with any other of our senses which differ with each individual, in the case of taste some are endowed with a "delicacy of imagination" that makes their ability to discern more acute. Moreover, he postulates the interesting notion of "the qualified observer" whose job is to develop his "taste" to an optimum standard: the critic.

Burke provides an exhaustive analysis of the sensible qualities that make something (nature or culture) either sublime or beautiful, also offering a psychological explanation of our experiencing them.

A different approach comes from idealist philosophy; thus, in his *Critique of Judgement*, published in 1790, Immanuel Kant rejects this rather simplistic empiricist definition of taste, replacing it with a new framework of classifying judgments and relegating the judgment of taste to the complicated *a priori* synthetic category. Taste is both *necessary* and *universal*—the two most important logical aspects alongside *disinterestedness* and *purposiveness without purpose*—which constitute the Kantian definition of the analytic of the beautiful because they establish its *a priori* aspect.

It would be interesting to compare fashion with the "time-based" arts such as photography, the cinema, and video art, whose reluctant acceptance into the pantheon of the sister arts had its fair share of controversy. There is an important distinction to be made between a photograph and a painting *qua* physical objects given that the former can be regarded as a "token" whilst the latter is a "type." This well-known distinction introduced by Richard Wollheim—who borrowed it from C. S. Peirce—states that "a physical object that can be identified as Ulysses or Der Rosenkavalier is not a view that can long survive the demand that we should pick out or point to that object." Meanwhile Raphael's *Donna velata* or *St. George* in the Pitti and Uffizi, respectively, are coextensive with the physical object. The painting *qua* art object is the "type;" copies of *Ulysses* or performances of *Der Rosenkavalier* are "tokens" of the "type," whose ontological status remains debatable (Wollheim 1978: 90–6). In the case of photography or the cinema, it can be argued that prints are "tokens" of the "type" whose ontological status is again problematic, but less relevant to this argument.

A garment is a "type;" the only parallel we find within the "time-based" arts is scenography, another "Cinderella" of the visual arts. Like clothes, stage designs are ephemeral, co-extensive with the physical time of the production, made of expendable materials. Both clothes and stage

designs become obsolete at the end of a season, or a production. Like clothes, the history of stage design stretches back to antiquity and the beginnings of theater, and our knowledge of it comes mostly from visual sources. More importantly, stage sets (together with theatrical costumes) share with clothes the same ontological status as "types,"—that is, they are uniquely produced within their own historical continuum, but lack the elevated art status, the "aura," which Walter Benjamin famously defined as "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction." The removal of the "aura" interferes also with their authenticity, redefined as "the essense of all that is transmissable from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin, 2000: 324). There are also differences: whilst histories of costume have begun to be published, a history of Western European scenography is yet to be written.

The main reason is that until the emergence of the "arts of the camera"—photography and the cinema—during the second half of the nineteenth century the issue of authorship continued to be dominant in the way art was defined. The radical interference of "mechanical reproduction" with the traditional "auratic" art-object opened the way to new candidates to attain the elevated label of art. Thus, a brilliant generation of stage and fashion designers emerged with the pioneering work of Adolphe Appia (1862–1928) and Paul Poiret (1879–1944) in scenography and fashion, respectively. Here similarities end, however, because whilst stage design remains firmly rooted within the visual realm (albeit subordinated to the traditionally recognized artistic elements in the theater pertaining to literature rather than the visual arts, e.g. narrative, characters, dialogue) fashion, however elevated, remains rooted in the everyday and therefore sociocultural methodologies have hitherto been the preferred mode of analysis.

An exception is to be found in the only essay to address the aesthetics of fashion: Karen Hanson's "Dressing Up, Dressing Down: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion," in which she states that "philosophy does indeed manifest sustained scorn for attention to personal appearance and fashionable dress" (Hanson 1998: 59). On the rare occasions when fashion did attract philosophy's attention, as in the case of Immanuel Kant, it was only to pour scorn on it.

This is the premise on which her argument is based and it should come as no surprise given that hitherto fashion has not been regarded as art any more than scenography has. Even the art status of photography and film has yet to be conclusively established. It has been pointed out that the emergence of semiotics in the 1950s and 1960s led to "the temporary eclipse of the study of film *as an art*, as a focal topic in film theory. Questions concerning art and the aesthetic were dissolved into the broader notions of symbolism, language, representation, mind and culture; in some quarters, the aesthetic is not merely ignored or marginalized, but explicitly attacked as an outmoded and bankrupt

notion" (Smith 2001, pp. 469–70). For a number of reasons, however, such as the emergence of the Russian Formalists and the writings of André Bazin, since the 1980s we have witnessed a return to "debates centered on film art and aesthetics" (Smith 2001: 470).

We even have a category of activities positioned at the interstices of the visual arts, including dance, circus, clowns and culture, kitsch, nature, rain, personal beauty, etc., which, like fashion, were not traditionally considered to be art and thus subjects for aesthetics. In an essay entitled "Why do Philosophers Neglect the Aesthetics of Dance," Francis Sparshott starts from this very premise and suggests that one of the reasons is that "dance is a female art, and our civilization has been patriarchal," with the proviso that this is not universal. More important is the corporeality of dance, given that "philosophers fear and hate the body." Sparshott justifies this neglect by saying that "there has not yet been any available basis for a philosophy of dance. Nor can such a basis be invented by philosophers. Philosophers cannot invent or bestow seriousness; they can only explain it" (Sparshott 1992: 563). This conclusion can easily be applied to fashion, which, like dance, belongs to the body.

Curt John Ducasse, the distinguished philosopher and author of the book *The Philosophy of Art*, first published in 1929, wrote an extraordinary but little known essay, first published in 1944, entitled "The Art of Personal Beauty." In it he argues that man is essentially a reflective being, an animal "who is not satisfied with merely living his life, but who is capable of—and insists upon—watching himself doing so!" (Ducasse 1992: 619). He is critical towards the attitude of "absorption in our inner selves to the neglect of the surface," which he argues, "betrays a degree of self-centredness verging on what has been called spiritual selfishness." This is an important statement in as much as it condemns prevailing notions of frivolity and lack of seriousness associated with any preoccupation with our "outer" selves and our propensity to dress up, adorn, make-up, and generally strive to look visually alluring, which has attracted, as he points out, the scorn of the philosophers. Ducasse, like no other philosopher, places appearance at the center of human happiness: "for the fact need hardly be stressed that our personal happiness and prosperity depend, throughout life, very considerably upon the attitude of the persons with whom we come into contact … to be attractive to others, then, is something of great moment to practically all of us" (Ducasse 1992: 620). To attract people, Ducasse argues, we need "likeableness" that depends more on "realities than on appearance," which is the quality philosophers are prepared to take seriously, but equally "fascination" which is "less closely connected with the real worth of its object." It is "fascination," central in human relations, that in turn hinges on our imagination, which is crucial in the phenomenon of "falling in love," and we know how essential this state is to our human happiness. "Clothing, then, aside from serving as the

mark of the body that modesty or climate or the desire for mystery may require essentially constitutes adornment. Clothing is fundamentally for us today an ornamental mask for the human form, and whatever manages to serve as such constitutes clothing" (Ducasse 1992: 622). There is therefore no reason why equal importance should not be conferred to the human head and face "covered, that is to say, with an ornamental mask. Such a mask—whether tied on or only painted on—constitutes, not embellishment, as did the deceiving devices already considered, but adornment" (Ducasse 1992: 622). Thus "beauty, mystery, interest, grandeur, glamour" (Ducasse 1992: 623) are means of fascination and therefore central to our eudemonia.

But is it art?

At the end of Ducasse's essay, "art" is firmly predicated of make-up and as he classifies clothing as a fundamental mode of adornment, it too qualifies for this status. The *apologia* comes in the last paragraph: "the word 'cosmetic' is derived from the Greek 'cosmos' which has been borrowed by modern languages to mean specifically the ordered universe. This derivation of its name would be enough to suggest that the cosmetic art, although often regarded with scant tolerance as but a catering to human vanity, nevertheless has noble connections" (Ducasse 1992: 624).

Hanson too references cosmetics from a "Baudelarian" point of view, which defends make-up as an improver of natural beauty. Unlike Ducasse, she does not assert that fashion is or could be considered a form of art, but like Ducasse she argues that we ignore the importance of our "outer" selves at our peril: "Philosophers, those who believe that the life worth living is the examined life, should find that willful ignorance of these matters ill suits them" (Hanson 1998: 69). Her conclusion hinges on the Freudian notion of the "gaze," whereby interest in appearance is caused by the recognition "that one is seen, that one is—among other things—an object of others' sight, others' cognition,"—that is, passive within the binary opposites masculine/feminine, active/passive. This is where help for philosophers is at hand from feminism, which could "teach philosophy some lessons … So if philosophy—with the help of feminism—could be brought to terms with our embodiment, could work to find an appropriate stance on the relation between the individual and social norms, could come to admit that each of us is, in part, an object to others, then philosophy might just change its attitude toward fashionable dress. Philosophers—wisdom-loving women and men—might then learn how to participate happily, deriving appropriate if ephemeral satisfactions, in fashion's fickle embrace" (Hanson 1998: 70).

Is there a conclusion to be drawn from this survey? Can it be argued that, albeit neglected by philosophers and academics alike, fashion is nevertheless an important form of art?

Arguments against have ranged from the fickle nature of fashion and its impermanence to its functional nature, and so on … The arguments for are to do with the visual loveliness of clothes, which cannot be disputed. Perhaps at this point we could enlist Immanuel Kant's logical definition of beauty in which he posits four "moments" or partial definitions: quality; quantity; relation; and modality. Of these, the first and third logical aspects (moments) are particularly relevant. Thus, in terms of quality the aesthetic judgment must be free of interest. The concept of "disinterestedness" originated with British Empiricism in the writings of the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who distinguishes between the enjoyment of beauty, which must be free of interest, and the desire of possession (Beardsley 1966: 181), adopted by Kant as a necessary (*a priori*) condition for the aesthetic experience. This constitutes then a powerful counter-argument in our efforts to relegate fashion to art given that the functional nature of clothes renders them objects of intense desire rather than aesthetic contemplation. We may ask, however, whether the kind of interest involved in this particular desire is analogous to our desire to possess other material objects such as paintings, or properties or Chinese porcelain from the Ming dynasty. The answer is no, because we are dealing with a specific kind of desire. If we consider Ducasse's argument again, our desire to adorn ourselves is more complex, and therefore to argue that our wish to possess a beautiful dress is similar to our wish to possess a painting by Monet, even if our desire for the latter is to do with formal qualities rather than market value, does not quite hold water for the obvious reason that clothes as a mode of adornment are essential to human happiness whereas paintings by Monet are not.

If we now consider Kant's famous concept of "purposiveness without purpose," introduced in his third logical moment or aspect of the definition of beauty, this will enable us to regard an object from the point of view of its "final purpose" (telos), but we could also regard it *as if* it had a purpose and simply enjoy it at a perceptual level without hindering the experience by applying a concept of the understanding upon it. Thus, "human beauty (i.e. of a man, a woman, or a child), the beauty of a horse, or a building (be it a church, palace, arsenal, or summerhouse), presupposes a concept of the purpose which determinates what the thing is to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; it is therefore adherent beauty … If now the judgement of taste in respect of the beauty of a thing is made dependent on the purpose in its manifold like a judgement of reason, and thus limited, it is no longer a free and pure judgement of taste." For Kant, judgments of taste have nothing to do with concepts: "A judgement of taste, then, in respect of an object with a definite internal purpose, can only be pure if either the person judging has no concept of this purpose or else abstracts from it in his judgement. Such a person, although forming an accurate judgement of taste in judging of the object as free beauty, would yet by another who considers the beauty in it only as a dependent attribute (who looks to the purpose of the object) be blamed and accused of false taste, although

both are right in their own way—the one in reference to what he has before his eyes, the other in reference to what he has in his thought" (Kant 1966: 66–7).

We can regard clothes then in two ways: from the point of view of their functional aspect we evaluate them according to those superlative qualities that enable them to fulfill their multiple functions of keeping us warm, giving us erotic appeal, adorning us, etc., but we can equally regard them as beautiful objects of aesthetic contemplation by disregarding the "concept" under which they fall and therefore ignoring their functional dimension. They could be (as indeed they are) objects of admiration in a museum.

I would like to close by quoting Guillaume Apollinaire on fashion in *Le poète assassiné*, written in 1927: "Fashion is becoming practical and no longer looks down on anything. It ennobles everything. It does for materials what the Romantics did for words" (Apollinaire in Benjamin 1999: 75–7).

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