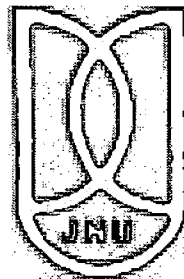


**FROM COURTROOMS TO CASUAL KITSCH: A
SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY OF SARTORIAL FASHION**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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25th July, 2009.

DECLARATION

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**From Courtrooms to Casual Kitsch: A Sociological Enquiry of Sartorial Fashion**” submitted by me is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work and has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University.

Arpita Dasgupta

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Introduction

Fashion is intriguing, and a phenomenon that has elicited much excitement and criticism since its inception centuries ago¹ and yet in spite of all the attention that it has been given, it continues to remain, to some extent at least, unsolved and untamed. While for some fashion is seen as a mere matter of clothing, and something whose existence might be brushed under the carpet for more reasons than one, the phenomenon of fashion has continued to grow manifold into a full fledged multi billion industry with larger than life qualities that are almost impossible to neglect. While it is true that very few of us venture out to dress ourselves in the likes of haute couture designs, yet, it also true that none of us can really escape fashion. Even when one wears something that is not fashionable, we can still learn something about the wearer's position vis-à-vis fashion, because of its close ties with notions of identity, self and society. As with most social phenomenon, fashion cannot be viewed in isolation; it demands an approach that can take into account all of its trajectories, making fashion an extremely complex and difficult phenomenon to study. Definitions seem to elude fashion, and it continues to remain ephemeral and transitory and dynamic.

Having said that, it is also important to accept that fashion as a category has a very wide ambit and the term 'fashionable' is used to point to a sense of aesthetic that is seen as acceptable or favourable in a given space and time for a variety of objects. Colloquially, the term fashion usually inspires images that have to do with the modern fashion industry, of glamour, of garments, of supermodels and the like, however, this is not to say that a study on fashion, has necessarily to do with any of the abovementioned objectives – one can just as well speak of fashionable clocks, or fashionable furniture, or fashionable architecture, or fashionable food, fashionable philosophies and so on. This study nevertheless focuses its attention strictly upon the discourses surrounding the development of sartorial fashion. The term sartorial

¹ Although there is much debate surrounding the exact date of origin of fashion, it is, however, possible to identify general periods that have been significant in the development of fashion. while some peg it as far back as the fourteenth century (Braudel 1981 cited in Entwistle 2000), others see it as a child of the industrial revolution.

'relates to a tailor or tailoring'², and 'pertains to clothing, or style, or manner of dress'³, and in this sense narrows down the scope of this study to a specific form of dress.

For a long time, however, studies on fashion were not considered of much importance in sociology, inspite of its centrality in human lives. There are a number of reasons for this lax, firstly, the fact that fashion was seen as the domain of women⁴ relegated it to much lower position than what it deserved, and secondly, the neglect of fashion reflects its historical location within the arts, rather than in the social sciences⁵. In addition to this, fashion has become an indispensable part of the modern world both in its understanding of everyday dress, and in its structuring influence in the presentation of the body. To observe fashion is to discern its sociological importance as an individual yet social, active yet structured, creative yet controlled phenomenon, in short, the study of sartorial fashion is the perfect example of structure and action⁶.

Fashion as it is commonly understood in sociology, refers to a specific system of dress, that is, said to have originated in Western Europe and has gradually spread to the rest of the globe. The date of origin of the fashion system is a highly debated topic and its said to have taken birth between the period that marked the end of the middle ages up until the early twentieth century. However, there are sociologists such as Craik and Eicher who do not see the fashion system as something exclusively found in modern industrialized societies, however, such notions are far and few.⁷ Dress maybe defined as the activity of clothing the body with an aesthetic element while fashion can be viewed as a specific system of dress. However, much of the contemporary literature on fashion no longer restricts itself to *haute couture*, and now includes everyday dress or street style. Also, while fashion is an important determinant of dress today, I would have to admit that it is not the only one. Entwistle⁸ notes that other social factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, age, etc. also have a role to play.

² <http://www.answers.com/topic/sartorial>;

³ <http://dictionary.infoplease.com/sartorial>.

⁴ Entwistle 2000

⁵ Turner 1985

⁶ Entwistle 2000.

⁷ Kawamura 2005; Craik, 1994.

⁸ *ibid*.

In the literature of fashion a number of terms are used interchangeably with different disciplines tending towards one term or the other. Fashion is seen to be used synonymously with dress, style, trend, fad, haute couture, prêt-a- porter and so on. Although all these terms are closely linked to the phenomenon of sartorial fashion, they are in themselves meaningful and maybe seen as particulars in the world of sartorial fashion. A style is a combination of silhouette, construction, fabric, and details that distinguishes an object from other objects in the same category. While short lived styles are called fads, a classic is a style that enjoys long term acceptance. Haute couture is high priced, custom made women's clothing originally from Paris that is mostly hand made. Ready to wear clothing (or prêt a porter) is factory made fashion in a range of sizes. A trend is a direction in which fashion may be heading.⁹

Fashion, today is indispensable, it encompasses all of our lives. Wilson¹⁰ replaces the metaphor of the iron cage with one that is better suited for the present epoch. She uses Derek Sayer's translation wherein he says that modernity is more like the shell on a snail's back, a burden yet something is impossible to live without. If one were to borrow this metaphor to understand the modern condition that includes the world's obsession with fashion, it will do more justice. While change in fashion is frequently documented, a very serious problem that arises from fashion is one of its most central characteristics, that is, its connection with the 'now'. Fashion pinpoints what is right in the present, but the moment it can be predicted accurately, it is no longer a matter of fashion. And this is the main reason that while most theorists agree on the basic principles of fashion, it is how they interpret it that differs.¹¹

Methods of Enquiry:

This study attempts at drawing a trajectory of events in the history of Europe that have shaped contemporary global sartorial fashion. It borrows the methods for a sociological analysis of sartorial fashion by using secondary sources of data on the proposed topic. This study is primarily based on information gathered from academic

⁹ Fashion Reader, 2007.

¹⁰Wilson cited in Kawamura 2005

¹¹ ibid.

books, articles, and field studies on fashion and dress in the world. In addition to this, it also uses data from current fashion magazines, marketing journals relating to sales garments, fashion blogs and themes from popular music, cinema and television. All diagrams and figures used in this study have been borrowed from published books and articles.

Brief synopsis of chapters:

While it is more or less wholly accepted that fashion is essentially about change, the first section of this study attempts at an exploration of the various theoretical perspectives that have been propounded for the study of fashion. It attempts at a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of fashion by bringing together the various methods through which its shifting aesthetic has been explained. The main question that this chapter of the proposed study tries to answer is, 'why do fashions change?', in spite of the obvious irrationality, illogical nature of its claim. The theories of Veblen, Spencer, Darwin, Carlyle, Simmel, Bourdieu, Young have all been used to understand fashion. It explores both the evolutionary scheme proposed by Spencer (1899) and the more modern cyclical approach to understanding the constant permutation and combination of the fashion aesthetic. In addition to this it locates the position of fashion vis-a-vis dress both within the scholarly field and on ground, by looking at disciplinary boundaries between sociology and anthropology.

The second section of the study deals with themes and ideas surrounding the inception of fashion as an organised system. It introduces the reader to the debate regarding the origin of the phenomenon of fashion and the vicissitudes of circumstances that helped shape its present *avatar*. It tries to locate the historical moments that have been beneficial in its inception, and especially deals with the theme of modernity as being the foothold upon which it has taken birth. This section focuses primarily on Western Europe as the location that has given rise to fashion, with Paris being the centre of its orbit. It also deals with certain developments within modernity, like the doctrine of individualism, the importance of the French revolution in setting the stage for a more liberal and egalitarian world, the changes in conception of beauty as a historical category, the role of the city and urban spaces in creating fashion. Also, it locates the modern fashion industry within a broader paradigm of a consumer culture and

attempts to trace the development of that great movement that originated in Britain in the eighteenth century. The themes of romanticism and dandyism are also explored in this section of the study.

Finally, the last section of the study attempts at an exploration of sartorial fashion in these post modern times trying to locate the changing categories of its markers. With the massive proliferation of fashion, and breaking down of traditional categories of trend setters and followers, this chapter attempts at a redefinition of the term fashion itself. If fashion is about being original and being on top, then one can ask the question that is fashion alive at all in this world of kitsch... and if kitsch refers to cheap imitation, and, a taste that is beyond the black and white categories of good and bad, then where does one locate fashion today? With the massive boom in casualisation of fashion and dress, it is interesting to look into questions of exclusivity regarding fashion. Can it be asked then if fashion exists anymore in the same form as in the one in which it originated? This section also looks into string that has forever bound fashion to art? Is fashion an art form or it is simply an imitation of art? This chapter looks at the role of the media and the mass marketing industry and the contribution it has made, on the one hand in a further democratisation of fashion, and on the other, the claims of the death of sartorial fashion.

Conclusion

The work is therefore an attempt to comprehend the concept, phenomenon and system¹² of fashion in the modern and post modern set up of today's world. It tries to define fashion keeping into consideration the fact that the word has had different connotations the term throughout history.¹³ As the concept of fashion has changed historically so has the phenomenon, in the sense that fashion in the fifteenth century is quite different from what is seen the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Yet, this is not to say that fashion has lost its significance now, on the contrary it continues to flourish, by absorbing new ideas and ethics that govern the globe today. It is this ambiguity of fashion, as well as its capacity to both alter and adapt itself to broader change that this work is trying to capture.

¹² Kawamura 2005 draws a distinction between the concept, phenomenon and system of fashion.

¹³ *ibid*, 4.

CHAPTER 1

Exploring Theoretical Perspectives on Fashion

Situating Sartorial Fashion within Academics:

If sociology finds its most intriguing fields of enquiry in those aspects of collective human thought and action that at first glance appear thoroughly irrational then it is only natural that the study of fashion should be taken up as a legitimate topic for sociological enquiry. However, this trend has been favoured only in the recent decades with the current millennium looking into a number of subjects like, that of, sartorial fashion that were disassociated with academics in the past.

It has been noted that the question ‘what is fashion?’ is one that has been investigated time and again over the centuries though its significance as a legitimate topic of scholarly debate within sociology has been relatively new. History has not been particularly kind to our subject of interrogation in terms of scholarly research due to its very association with the idea of ‘frivolous’¹⁴ that paled it in comparison with other ‘weighty’ issues that then demanded academic rigour. This discomfort with studies in fashion in academics been worded astutely by Valerie Steele¹⁵ wherein she speaks of the tabooed space that was assigned to fashion studies in academic circles. The equating of fashion with the four lettered profanity clearly speaks to us of the position fashion occupied, both as a subject for scholarly interrogation as well as an aspect of human indulgence. There are a number of reasons that may be responsible for this exclusion –

A popular explanation for this oversight that is provided by Entwistle (2000) is accorded to the situation of fashion was within the domain of women – whereby fashion came to be seen as trivial, frivolous, irrational and wasteful! However, this argument with all its appeal does leave some loopholes in its account as, up until the

¹⁴ Entwistle 2000

¹⁵ Steele, From, *Lingua Franca*, April 1991: <http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/180/steele.htm>

early nineteenth century, elite men were the first to adopt the latest fashions and they nurtured their love for fashionable clothes right into an advanced age¹⁶. Interestingly, in contrast to the finery that the men adorned themselves in, a woman's role as a wife and a home-maker put her in a disadvantageous position in as far as fashion was considered. Further on, with notions of chastity and morality in place, married women were often required to cover their hair and clothe in more modest garments in comparison with their male counterparts. Since fashion is often associated with sexual charms, marriage and motherhood resulted in sort of restraint on a woman's adoption of fashion. This finding is therefore a stark contrast to the popular perception that clubs fashion and the female gender under a single roof. One of the reasons that can be used to justify this gap is the 'Great masculine renunciation',¹⁷ an event wherein men seemingly gave up their right to the use of brighter colours and ornamentation in favour of a more austere and reserved sartorial selection. What follows is a period of relatively stable men's fashion with the white shirt, black tie combination as the pinnacle of modern fashion. Crane¹⁸ argues that today there is an age segmentation of the clothing behaviour of men, while women are categorised as one, and she continues to explain that in our contemporary age graded culture, the post modern construction of non-occupational identities through clothing appears most strongly among the young and among racial and sexual minorities. The role of gender in fashion is one that has cropped up time and again, and, interestingly a fresh perspective on the matter is provided through the link between fashion and architecture in the work of Le Corbusier. Cornelissen¹⁹ points out that while contrasting the dignity of British fashion for men with the masquerade of women's fashion, Le Corbusier praises the latter over the former because it has undergone *change*, the change of modern time. "Woman has preceded us. She has carried out the reform of her dress. She found herself at a dead end: if she followed fashion, she would have had to give the advantages of modern techniques, of modern life."²⁰

Coming back to the earlier works on fashion, we find that what had emerged in place of academic discourses on fashion were moral disquisitions by philosophers and

¹⁶ Barthes 2006

¹⁷ Flugel (1930 cited in Kawamura: 10)

¹⁸ Crane 2000; *ibid.*

¹⁹ Cornelissen (2005: 96)

²⁰ Le Corbusier (1991:78; *ibid.*)

moralists, and up until the nineteenth century moral criticism and criticism of fashion went hand in hand²¹. The earliest writings of this kind can be traced back to the sixteenth century²² who censured fashion for its superficiality and its emphasis on outward display instead of inward melioration. This body of work although descriptive of the times in which they were written was not sociological and fashion was interpreted as the outcome of conscious choices made by individuals allowing them to comply with an irrational and highly variable set of clothing patterns. Vanity, snobbery and a narcissistic attitude were seen as reasons that gave an impetus to fashion. A distinguishing text that marks the commencement of sociological inquiry into the realm of fashion and dress was given by the English scholar Herbert Spencer in 1854 in his pioneering work titled *Manners and Fashion*²³. Although Spencer did not do away with notions of morality all together, he was the first person who attempted to sociologise the subject of sartorial fashion. According to him, the single over arching principle that governed all of nature and human life was evolution, and fashion too was understood through this approach. I shall return to Spencer later on in this chapter.

Yet another important point that demands attentions is that the neglect of fashion reflects the historical location of fashion within the arts rather than in social sciences²⁴. This is ironical as fashion demonstrates the quintessential opposition between structure and agency in human life. Entwistle²⁵ points out the sociological importance of fashion lies in the fact that it is individual yet social, active yet structured, creative yet controlled phenomenon that makes it the perfect example of structure and action. Further when one considers how important fashion is in framing our everyday choices about dress, how it is major structuring influence in the social presentation of the body in everyday life, it seems quite remarkable that sociology should have largely ignored it. Turner²⁶ gives two reasons for the academic neglect of the body in sociological analysis. Firstly, he states that, social theory and particularly, sociology had inherited the Cartesian dualism which prioritized the mind over the body, and secondly, as part of its critiques of behaviorism and essentialism; the

²¹ Koenig 1973; *ibid.*

²² Johnson, et al., 2003.

²³ Carter 2003.

²⁴ Turner 1985.

²⁵ Entwistle 2000

²⁶ Turner *ibid.*

classical sociological tradition tended to avoid explanations of the social world through the human body. Also, considering the body as a natural and not a social phenomenon kept it out of reach of sociological analysis. However, this has gradually changed with growing recognition that the body has a history, and that it is a cultural construct rather than a biological one.

Conceptualising Fashion and /or Dress:

However, before I proceed further, it is important to clarify at the start the nuances of the terms fashion and dress. In the literature of fashion, various terms are employed interchangeably and indiscriminately: fashion, dress, clothing, costume and so on with different disciplines tending towards one or other term. As per the requirements of this paper, there is a need to present a fair distinction between fashion and dress in lieu of their propensity to be studied under sociology or anthropology.

Owing to the circumstances of the inception of the two disciplines, there has emerged a discernibly distinct body of writing relating to fashion and dress. Although the lines between the two disciplines have faded significantly over the years, it has been seen that while anthropology has shown a preference of studying 'dress' and adornment in non-modern or traditional societies²⁷, sociology's has laid its thrust on studying 'fashion' in modern, and especially western societies. This view of fashion accepts it as a phenomenon that is a product of a certain kind of society, with a distinct historical past. For instance, one is reminded of Levi Strauss's differentiation between hot and cold societies to elaborate this bias that exists between the disciplines in defining what societies have fashion, and what others have dress²⁸. This distinction views cold societies (or traditional) as ones with stable social orders and fixed hierarchies that do *not* have fashion, in contrast to the clothing found in the ever changing hot societies (or the modern urban setting). This approach understands fashion as a term that carries with it more specific meanings of a dress that is found in western modernity, although there are sociologists such as Craik and Eicher who do

²⁷ Barnes & Eicher 1992; Cordwell & Schwartz 1979; Polhemus & Proctor 1978.

²⁸ Neissen 2003

not see the fashion system as something exclusively found in modern industrialized societies, however, such notions are far and few²⁹.

The colouring of fashion by way of temporal and spatial aspects also makes it a politically loaded tool that draws distinctions between societies. Its self governing logic is what decides which of the world's adornment is fashion and which of it is not. However, there are certain disadvantages to this approach, even if one were to accept the view that fashion is essentially a product of western modernity. First and foremost, a problem arises with the narrowing down of contemporary fashion studies squarely to the west. There is a need to theorise fashion keeping in mind the changes in the global scenario and by re-examining this Orientalist understanding of fashion. In this regard, an interesting analysis is presented by Sandra Neissen³⁰ wherein she points out the defects of the trend in contemporary leanings in studies relating to fashion that delegate it as a force that is essentially 'western'. With the globalisation of the Asian dress and the blossoming of black fashion, the stereotyping of fashion as white American or European fashion is problematic. While the origin of the fashion system is relegated to the west - *today*, fashion is more global rather than western. Although a complete reorientation has not taken place, there is some sort of a change that is more inclusive in its approach to fashion. In pointing to the need for a model 'for studying dress in the modern, globally interconnected world,'³¹ Neissen provides a critique of the costume historian's evolutionary model for its bias towards Western superiority. Today, we see in the journal *Fashion Theory*, contributions to Western *and* non Western dress phenomena and this maybe seen as an important step in developing a global model³². Also studies of non Western fashion, such as Jennifer Craig³³ acknowledge fashion as a cultural technology that is purpose built for specific locations.

Apart from the dichotomy between the usage of the terms fashion and dress in sociology and anthropology respectively, fashion and dress may also be seen a process – that is fashion as the invisible component of dress; it provides the raw

²⁹ Entwistle 2000

³⁰ Neissen; *ibid.*

³¹ Baizerman et al. (1993 cited in Neissen, *ibid.*)

³² Neissen; *ibid.*

³³ Craik 1994 cited in *The Fashion Reader* 2007.

materials for everyday dress³⁴. While, fashion as an abstract phenomenon is commonly glorified – we cannot ignore the process through which this abstruseness of fashion is translated into dress by individuals. In this sense we see dress as an ‘activity’ of clothing the body with an aesthetic element. Here, dress may be defined as the activity of clothing the body with an aesthetic element while fashion can be viewed as a specific system of dress. Comprehending the two terms from this angle makes fashion an important component of dress, but not the only one as there are other social factors, apart from fashion, such as, class, gender, ethnicity, age and so on that play a role in determining dress³⁵.

Here fashion can be understood as one of the factors providing social constraint in dress. Even if an individual is seen to be uninterested in fashionable clothing, he or she might put in some extra effort in dressing in order to avoid social censure. Different situations impose different ways of dressing, sometimes by imposing ‘rules’ or codes of dress. This aspect of fashion brings to light its coercive ability. Conventions of dress and fashion are in Durkheimian analogy general, collective and coercive although the reasons for such may differ³⁶. ‘As social forces’, both dress and fashion ‘are external to and outside of the individual; they are coercive, in that individuals are compelled to act by them; and they are objectively measurable’³⁷. Therefore, dress is a matter of morality³⁸. Bell³⁹ observes how even persons not very much concerned about their appearance, often take great care to dress well enough simply to avoid social censure. In elaborating on what he calls ‘sartorial conscience’ he cites the example of a five day old beard which cannot be worn to the theatre without eliciting much disapproval and adverse criticism, as one would be subjected to, for dishonourable conduct! Also, Simmel,⁴⁰ notes how even those who choose to defy fashion through its denial are in fact unconsciously proving the strength of the phenomenon, through its mere negation, in place for exaggeration. While all things fashionable come under the category of the modern, the opposite phenomenon becomes the un-modern, and they both embody fashion through contrasting choices.

³⁴ Wilson (1985 cited in Entwistle 2000)

³⁵ Entwistle 2000.

³⁶ Durkheim 1895.

³⁷ Penguin Dictionary of Sociology 2000: 322)

³⁸ Entwistle (ibid: 8)

³⁹ Bell (1976 cited in Entwistle 2000).

⁴⁰ Simmel 1905.

In fact it becomes decidedly fashionable in whole circles of large-scale society to clothe oneself in an un-modern manner, and this, explains Simmel, possibly one the most curious socio-psychological complications of the fashion world. For instance, vintage clothing an exclusive category, both in terms of its availability and its price, its rarity and its obsolescence heightens its charm.

Defining Fashion

'It is difficult to give an exact definition of fashion because the word has had different connotations throughout history: the meaning and significance of the word have changed to suit the social customs and clothing habits of people in different social structures'⁴¹. The word 'fashion' therefore, may be used as an umbrella term, and its meaning grasped only by carefully considering the idiosyncrasies that surround it in different times in history. Even in the present, fashion is not a unified in practice, that is to say, at least in the modern and post-modern set-up of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, there is no such thing as 'one' fashion. Given the prominence that *haute couture* enjoys in any discussion pertaining to fashion, it is not to be mistaken that at any point, it is the only mode of clothing that is fashionable. Fashions adapt to local conditions, and the larger cultural conditions of a given time and space. In the words of Fine and Leopold⁴², fashion comes across as a 'hybrid concept' whose study covers the 'dual concept of fashion as a cultural phenomenon and as an aspect of manufacturing with the accent on production technology'⁴³. Similarly, Entwistle⁴⁴ points out emphatically that, 'there is no one fashion system, but a number of fashion system producing clothes for different markets'.

However, let me not misconstrue the truth - this is not to say that there is no such thing as the essence of fashion. Fashion encompasses two qualities that remain constant throughout. The first of these qualities refers to its underlying principle of relating to the present, or the 'now' and secondly, is its inherent capacity for change ensuring its continuous aspiration towards novelty. This is to say that fashion is

⁴¹ Kawamura (2005: 5)

⁴² Fine & Leopold (1993; cited in Entwistle 2000)

⁴³ Leopold (1992: 2, *ibid.*)

⁴⁴ Entwistle (*ibid.*: 17)

essentially about change - it is born of change and it thrives in conditions that sanction its chronic renewals.

- Fashion as *constant* Change:

I begin with the second of the characteristics mentioned above – that, that fashion is faithfully analogous to change. Paradoxically, the only thing permanent about fashion is that it is essentially about change. I refer to the great philosopher of eternal change, Heraclitus, and his famous aphorism, “Panta Rhei”: [πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει] to explain it further.

One might begin with Heraclitus’ famous Flux doctrine⁴⁵. Around 500 BC, he wrote:

“potamoisi toisin autoisin embainousin hetera kai hetera hudata epirrei”

which is directly translated as,

“On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow”.
(Cleanthes from Arius Didymus from Eusebius)⁴⁶

Any discussion of the thought of Heraclitus labours under the weight of his obscurity and it is necessary to mention that, that what I borrow from - his much debated doctrine of flux has always been a source of mystery and debate amongst its interpreters over the centuries. If the above interpretation of Heraclitus is right, then it is one that very succinctly puts to perspective the fundamental idea behind the modern fashion system at work today.

In other words, it is the idea that ‘one kind of long-lasting material reality exists by virtue of constant turnover in its constituent matter’ where ‘constancy and change are not opposed but inextricably connected’⁴⁷. The above mentioned maxim does not claim that all things are forever changing in such a manner that they may not be countered again; rather it says that for some things to endure they must undergo

⁴⁵ Guthrie 1962 [1977]: 419

⁴⁶ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2007

⁴⁷ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2007

constant change. The fashion system we know of today is one that is characterized by continuous change and fluctuations in style, yet, if this were not to be, then fashion itself would cease to exist.

Although, obviously never intended for interpreting fashion, this logic is very useful for understanding that it is only through continual change that the fashion system functions and also, that it is only through change that it aspires towards innovation. Here, change is not destructive - while it means temporal death for certain styles, this is a necessity; redundancy or obsolescence being the mediums through which there is recreation and rebirth ensuring survival of the system. The second criteria of fashion, that is, its association with novelty may be seen as corollary of its first principle. While the first statement is more or less established and agreed upon universally, it is the second one that is debated upon. For many, like Genovese⁴⁸ contemporary fashion is pivoted around the concept of 'newness' or 'nowness'. The directional flows of fashion change, that is, its direction in terms of its novelty is more difficult to explain. Fashion under capitalism exhibits the particular feature of planned obsolescence⁴⁹. It is an explanation of this facet of fashion that has invited many an opinion and decipherment from people in diverse walks of life. I shall return this theme shortly.

Classical theories explaining change in Fashion:

While the above section demonstrates how fashion is essentially about change, it does not however explain its *manner* of change. There have emerged a number of theories that attempt at decoding the patterns of change in fashion and unravelling the mysteries behind its undying quest for the novel - however, there is no one theory that has been granted universal acceptance. Also, we find that no ultimate or all encompassing theory explaining fashion has emerged as the very place in which fashion exists, that is, within culture, has been transforming swiftly and continuously. Instead these theories bring to light the variegated faces of fashion and bring to light the vicissitudes of circumstances that shape its trajectory. This section attempts to summarise the significance of the classical theories of fashion that took into serious consideration the phenomenon of fashion.

⁴⁸ Genovese (1984 cited in Craik 1994: 5)

⁴⁹ Craik; *ibid.*

Two perspectives will be highlighted, each of which explain through different means the constant changes that define fashion. According to them, the directional flows of fashion tend towards one of the two patterns: evolutionism or cyclical revolutions.

A note on Social Evolutionism

The former of two processes mentioned above, that is, social evolutionism, attempts at an explanation of fashion by applying to it the universal laws of evolution. The idea of evolution and progression has been applied to a large number of schemes, including music, for instance the 1896 publication by Sir Hubert Parry titled “The Evolution of the Art of Music”⁵⁰. In analysing fashion however the use of the principles of social evolutionism must be credited to the work of Herbert Spencer who attempts a comprehensive explanation of fashion and dress in work, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol.2. It is through the work of Spencer that we come to know what has come to be known as the theory of Social Evolution. Although this phenomenon came to be known as Social Darwinism based on the assumption that Spencer used the theory of evolution propounded by Darwin and administered it onto the study of fashion, this view has been contested as not only did Spencer use the word evolution before Darwin did, he is also credited for coining the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’. According to him, ‘everything in nature has its laws’ – and this included man as well and even though this assertion of human life being law bound is not an original one, what counts is *how* Spencer conceived of these laws⁵¹. His influence has penetrated the works of both Veblen and Simmel who are the other classical thinkers to have worked on fashion.

Fashion as Evolution -

The concept of social Darwinism and the idea that the development of dress presents a strong analogy to that of organisms as explained by the modern theories of evolution takes one back to the work of George Darwin⁵² who takes a uni-linear and one dimensional approach in his study of everyday dress, stressing on the fact that like in

⁵⁰ Carter 2003.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Darwin (1872 cited in Carter 2003) - He does not clarify his position on the differences between fashion and dress very clearly.

organic evolution, in dress too, there is never sudden or unexpected change. He borrows the famous aphorism - "natura non facit saltum"⁵³, and applies it to change in dress. According to him, change in dress takes place through natural selection, like in organism, and there is always gradual change and continuity in its alterations.

This means that dresses adapt to surrounding conditions through the process of natural selection with non-functional forms of dress gradually dying out while the utilitarian detailing is retained. For instance, he writes, "... when it ceased to be requisite that men in active life should be ready to ride at any moment, and when riding had for sometime ceased to be the ordinary method of travelling knee breeches and boots yielded to trousers."⁵⁴ Here he introduces the role of fashion, as an important element in change of dress. Darwin defines fashion as "the love for novelty and the extraordinary tendency which man have to exaggerate any peculiarity, for the time being considered a mark of good station in life, or handsome in itself..." Fashion here is looked upon by Darwin as means through which everyday dress changes whereby when the use of a design in a dress has become redundant, it is retained either in an atrophied condition or it is nurtured and exaggerated as an object of fashion. Fashion here maybe understood as a mark of status and herein one sees a similarity with the ideas of Veblen⁵⁵. From this perspective, fashion develops on a hierarchical evolutionary scale.

In a nutshell, therefore, it is through the process of natural selection that forms (or designs) of dress exist. Those which do not perform any function gradually diminish leaving behind those that still have a role to play. However, he says that in addition to these laws of progress and natural selection, it is through fashion selection that new dress forms are developed and *not* through sexual selection.⁵⁶

Interestingly, this idea of gradual change in fashion is a stark contrast to popular notions of it being erratic and unpredictable. Is capriciousness then a characteristic of fashion in the post modern era? This question demands an answer and I shall return to

⁵³ *Nature does not take a leap* - This adage is generally attributed to Linnaeus and expresses the evolutionary idea of gradual change and continuity. (Darwin, 1859)

⁵⁴ Darwin (1872 cited in Johnson, et al. 2003: 97)

⁵⁵ Veblen 1899.

⁵⁶ Carter 2003.

it later, however, in the meantime, a study conducted by Agnes Young in the year 1937 that illuminates the notion of fashion as slow, steady and predictable remodelling illustrates, with real life data, Darwin's idea of gradual change in dress. A crucial difference between the approaches that needs to be pointed out is that while Young⁵⁷ relies on a cyclical approach to the study of fashion Darwin approaches the problem in a uni-linear evolutionary pattern. Through this study she demonstrates the predictive and cyclical aspect of fashion by showing how the fashionable dress for women has changed over the centuries.⁵⁸

The figures show to us the fashion designs in women's dresses from the year 1780 onwards up until the 1950's. The study records three types of accepted street dress skirts namely, bell, back-fullness and tubular which have according to Young succeeded one another in cycles lasting approximately thirty three years. It is demonstrated through this pattern how changes in fashion are a continuous process that take place in a slow steady pace without jerky aberrations in consecutive years⁵⁹. Therefore, yearly or seasonal changes in fashion take place in a manner such that every fresh season differs from the fashions of the previous year and that there are no repetitions or duplicates within each annual fashion season. This is not in accord with the popular belief concerning fashion changes, which appear to hold that rates of change are highly variable and that from time to time sweeping variations occur. This view holds that fashion changes are not sudden, unpredictable or capricious. Finally, the third principle holds that "fashion change in women's dress always proceeds by gentle modifications of what has previously prevailed and never by abrupt departure from it."⁶⁰ Each new fashion can be traced back to its predecessor for it is always an outgrowth or an adaptation in which lineal descent is clearly evident. These three maybe combined in the statement that fashion change in women's dress is a continuous, slow process of modification. This study portrays fashion as a steady means of change, and as pointed out earlier, a view that breaks off significantly with the erratic and unpredictable nature of fashion.

⁵⁷ Young (1937 cited in Carter 2003)

⁵⁸ Kawamura 2005; Carter 2003.

⁵⁹ Young; *ibid*.

⁶⁰ Young (1937 cited in Johnson, et al., 2003: 119)

The paper returns to the work of Spencer in elucidating further the explanations that were forwarded with the help of social evolutionism for understanding fashion. Spencer theory of social evolution attempts to explain phenomenon by returning to its roots and tracing its development from there on. In this regard, in order to understand the value of dress and fashion in society Spencer returns to the very beginning drawing links from the activities of primitive man to his own times. This method of studying came to be known as the Comparative Method.

However one has to keep in mind that when Spencer is speaking of fashion he has a very different conception from what is prevalent today. He is not concerned with individual styles or detailing in dress, rather his work revolves primarily on the effects of the social order upon the generality. Therefore, one does not see in his work an in depth study of a single society instead he concentrates upon social institutions like kinship, marriage, and in this case, dress and fashion⁶¹. According to Spencer⁶², change in dress amounted to a process of civilisation whereby ornamentation became a part of a struggle for social rank and power. Spencer labels early forms of clothing as trophies. Trophies were the result of the spoils of the hunt, and those who killed were respected and marked out giving them power. Trophies evolved into badges, which gave birth to ornaments and on. For Spencer, clothing has the same capabilities as a badge in symbolically designating prestige and social position or class distinction, and in fact as society becomes complex, items of decorative clothing or ornament become distinctive of rank and position. Dress ensures and strengthens positions of rank and status as it becomes more complex and codified.

Despite the existence of Sumptuary laws that is laws forbidding the usage of certain kind of garments reserved for the upper classes, the dress of the higher grades of society are attractive to those of the lower orders of the precisely because they are the clothes of persons with power and authority. Here Spencer links the idea of political control to fashion whereby the fashions of the higher classes are emulated in order to jump up the social hierarchy. This is the manner in which clothing styles spread out of their points of origin as others desire to imitate them. From this point on imitation

⁶¹ Carter 2003.

⁶² Spencer (1987 [1966] cited in Johnson, et al., 2003)

becomes one of the central elements in all theories of fashion and further points to questions of class hierarchy, that is, explored further in the work of Simmel.

There is a great deal of ambiguity in Spencer's writing on fashion. It is not always easy to comprehend if he is referring to fashionable changes among an elite or something closer to shifts in custom. However, he draws a clear distinction between fashion and the ceremonial usage of trophies, badges and costume. While the latter is about 'unlikeliness', fashion is about likeliness. Hew writes "But in those modification of behaviour, dress, mode of life,&c., which constitute Fashion, likeliness instead of un-likeliness is insisted upon. Respect must be shown by following the example of those in authority, not by differing from them⁶³". Prior to Veblen, the concept of imitation had been dealt with by Spencer, who posits two types of imitation, reverential and competitive. While the former refers to imitation of a superior power, like that of a king (or high society as seen in cities, competitive imitation is prompted by the desire to assert equality with a person. The latter of the two distinctions mentioned above is probably more at tune with modern sensibilities with its multiple fashion systems. We will see later how there are fashion in the present scenario that lie on a horizontal plane rather than on a vertical axis. If Spencer left off with generalised considerations of competitive imitation in an industrial set up, the work of Veblen takes us further in grasping the brass tacks of the early fashion system as it developed in the West.

In referring to emulation in fashion, one cannot possibly part with the delight of reading and appreciating Veblen for his astute judgement and wit in recording for future generations, the earnestness of pecuniary ostentation for gaining admission and securing ones situation in high society. Veblen develops an evolutionary framework in which preferences are determined socially in relation to the position of individuals in the social hierarchy⁶⁴. A theory although postulated keeping in mind the changes that characterised the America in which Veblen resided, it has often been used to analyse European society of the same period. Veblen's work is a result of unprecedented industrial explanations that resulted in a visible class of wealthy, powerful elites whose lifestyles differed significantly with those of lower economic

⁶³ Spencer (1897 [1966] cited in Johnson, et al., 2003:

⁶⁴ Triggs

classes. Influenced by Marxist philosophy, he critiqued this so called leisure class for its conspicuous consumption and outrageous waste of good including dress⁶⁵. According to this theory, the model for consumption broadly follows a pattern of higher to lower with the upper classes being privileged set of trend-setters. Emulation of the higher classes by those placed lower in the hierarchy set the wheels in motion, with the upper sections constantly recreating styles in order to maintain the status-quo and keeping the lower classes separate from themselves.

While consumption is a broad term that is used to a large variety of articles, he focuses primarily on the consumption of dress as it is one of the most prominent and visible markers of an individual's prosperity. Therefore conspicuous consumption of fashion in terms of dress was viewed by Veblen as the most important factor determining consumer behaviour, not only for the rich but all social classes. In this sense, the poorest of the classes attempt to emulate the social behaviour and practices of the classes immediately above it, and therefore, they too are subject to the pressures to engage in conspicuous consumption. Triggs writes that during the 1890's when Veblen wrote, he viewed the drive for drive for conspicuous consumption as the main force behind the consumer boom that was setting in the United States⁶⁶.

Wealth accumulation was considered a matter of esteem and granted a high status to those who owned as opposed to those who didn't. Display of wealth was accomplished through two means, conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure. This is important, as wealth by itself was insufficient (Veblen 1899); the transformation of wealth into status was to be achieved through either of the two processes mentioned above. The former remains till this day in a number of arenas of human society as a marker of status - and as far as fashionable garments is concerned it is consumption of the latest fashions is indeed the way to show the world ones position in the fashion hierarchy. Further on a key element that runs parallel through both processes of acquiring status is the notion of waste, again, one that fits in perfectly with modern practices of fashion, whereby a garment is discarded not because of wear-tear but because of a change in fashion.

⁶⁵ Veblen (1899 cited in Carter 2003: 43)

⁶⁶ Triggs; *ibid.*

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Therefore, Veblen proposes a linear theory of consumption wherein imitation occurs from the lowest to the highest with the upper class as the pioneer of new fashions. Fashion is understood here against the canvas of class society and it is treated as a stamp that sets of each class from another. The one dimensional approach to consumption however has been criticised often enough for being too restrictive. As opposed to the Trickle down model, a more inclusive model, that is, the Trickle Round model is proposed by Triggs. This model puts forward a circular circuit in which there is adaptation or emulation of practices and preferences of the lower classes by the upper segments of society. However, one must remember that in critiquing Veblen, it is important to keep in mind the social colourings of the time he belonged to. With the growth of late capitalism in the twentieth century, class boundaries cut across social hierarchies and fashion remains no longer the privilege of the upper classes.

An argument in favour of the Trickle up model is substantiated with the proliferation of denims or jeans in the fashion circuit⁶⁷. Field and Ramsted refer to the 'status float' phenomenon, as the "tendency of fashionable practices to percolate upward from lower to higher status groups"⁶⁸. This is the 'trickle down' argument and forms a bulk of the criticism against Veblen, however, as Triggs argues this is to view Veblen's theory in a very simplistic manner and takes away the subtlety and delicacy of his work. Along with this, the second assertion against the theory is that in the present age, the display of wealth has been taken a turn and it is no longer carried out in the manner as it was and therefore points to a loophole in the theory. In order to take Veblen's case forward, Triggs introduces the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu⁶⁹ to substantiate for the changes that have taken place in the latter half of the 20th century onwards.

This directional process of imitation (or conforming) and subsequent innovation of new styles (differentiation) forms the basis of the trickle down theory. In critique of this view, there have evolved other explanations that take into account a more varied world view. G.A Field's observed a reverse trend that he called the 'status float

⁶⁷ Fine & Leopold (1993 cited in Triggs)

⁶⁸ Field (1970) & Ramsted (1998: 13) cited in The Fashion Reader 2007.

⁶⁹ Bourdieu 1984.

phenomenon'. This might be seen as a response to the youthquake, sexual revolution and civil rights movement all of it which led to a desire of authenticity. In this unstable atmosphere affiliation with a sub group or ideological cause found symbolic expression in appearance and was not necessarily associated with socio-economic groups. This subgroups innovated new looks and purposefully differentiated themselves from imitators. This has often been called the trickle up theory. Anthropologist Ted Polhemus called the process 'Bubble up'⁷⁰. C.W.King⁷¹ observed a horizontal flow of fashion and called it the trickle across theory.

A key point of Veblen's analysis of the different sections of the leisure class is that established members of the upper class use their accumulated culture to distinguish themselves from the 'new money'. I refer to the many allusions made of this theme in literature – for instance in Howard's End, Great Gatsby⁷² - Canterbury, for example, in applying Veblen's analysis to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), argues that the social upstart Gatsby lacks the necessary culture to win the love of the refined Daisy, who is married into a family of established money. It is in these notions that we find the subtleties of Veblen's work, and he does give credit to culture as means to entering the top echelons of the leisure class. Therefore, one sees in Veblen's work the vestiges of a concern with culture that was given its due course in the work of Bourdieu who develops it as cultural capital. Cultural capital can be defined as the accumulated stock of knowledge about the products of artistic and intellectual traditions, which is learned through educational training and-crucially for Bourdieu also through social upbringing⁷³. In a powerful explanation of how inequality in the social structure is reproduced in the education. Cultural capital of a class is therefore validated through its aesthetic taste which is in turn used to secure positions of status in the social hierarchy. We find that Bourdieu takes Veblen's argument a step forward giving emphasis to the notion of acquired cultural capital more than the latter.

So for Bourdieu there is a trickle up of tastes from the working classes to the upper classes that allows the latter to outflank the middle classes whose pretentiousness leaves them confused in the way in which popular tastes are embraced.

⁷⁰ Polhemus (1998 cited in *The Fashion Reader* 2007)

⁷¹ King (1973: *ibid.*)

⁷² Canterbury (1999 cited in Triggs)

⁷³ Bourdieu 1984.

It makes a comparison between two alternative models for the transmission of tastes between social classes. In Veblen's trickle-down model, in which tastes transmit from the upper class through to the middle and working class strata. For Bourdieu, however, there is rather a "trickle round" of tastes, with upper class tastes drawing at times from popular working class tastes and also transmitting to the less sophisticated middle class. Instead of a one-directional flow of tastes the transmission is circular, to some extent embracing the trickle-down effect but also allowing for the status float phenomenon, so championed by Veblen's critics, in which there is feed-back up the social hierarchy. Whereas as Veblen argued that the working classes, although hampered by a lack of resources are subject to the drive of emulation, Bourdieu develops his notion of popular culture to argue that the working classes are resistant and opposed to the tastes of those higher up in the social hierarchy. On the one hand it could be regarded as an updating of Veblen's framework in the view of the increasing importance of popular culture since the last century. On the other hand it could also be argued that Bourdieu's framework is somewhat inflexible in dismissing the possibility of this trickle-down effect.

However there are a number of problems with Veblen's theory. His analysis of the bourgeois woman lacks any sense of agency and fashion is conceived of an over-determining and negative force in the life of the Victorian women⁷⁴. Both Kunzle and Steele offer a rather different view of the Victorian woman's relationship to fashion and revise the standard fashion story of the corset as oppressive to women⁷⁵ Steele account sets out to consider the role of erotic display in fashion, arguing that the traditional image of the repressed Victorian woman needs a revision. She posits that the role of eroticism in Victorian fashions was very high and that there is a much stronger continuity between the 19th and the 20th centuries than is generally believed. Kunzle⁷⁶ goes further by arguing that the corset wearing woman was indeed a socially and sexually active, assertive individual. Veblen's account of women in his analysis is further out dated when one considers the changes in society with the entry of women in the work place. In the dealing with the politics of fidelity of men and women

⁷⁴ Entwistle 2000

⁷⁵ Kunzle (1982) and Steele (1985): *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Kunzle; *ibid.*

Simmel⁷⁷ makes a rather interesting point in its manifestation on fashion. Although it is difficult to take seriously this aspect of his analysis, however it makes do for a rather outlandish theory. Both men and women need much from life in certain quantities and fidelity too comes in select doses, however the matter remains such that both obtain their doses from varying contents of life and thereby seek to balance them. Since, woman is a more faithful being on the whole, she is required to fulfil her need for liveliness in an other sphere of her life and this is the sphere of sartorial fashion. Man, on the other hand, who is in his essence less faithful, finds his desire for liveliness and change satisfied and thereby his sartorial conscience remains steady. The question that remains to be asked is – is this theory applicable still? Probably, not. With the millennium, men and fashion has reached a stage where it is capable of competing with female fashion with equal ease. According to him, fashion gives a women compensation for her lack of social position in a professional group.

Cyclical Theories of Fashion

Unlike Spencer and Darwin who posit that change in the form of dress is an evolving linear progression, Simmel proposes that change in fashion is cyclical. Fashion differentiates not only one era from another but also each social class from the other. He says that fashion demands most importantly a differentiated society.

Simmel⁷⁸, in his classic discussion of fashion change, points out that fashion is a process of imitation, not evolution. In the process of fashion change, emulation leads to imitation, and imitation leads to both equalisation and the need for further differentiation. Unlike Spencer (1896) and Darwin (1872) where change in forms of dress is an evolving linear progression, Simmel (1904) proposes that change in fashion is cyclic⁷⁹. Simmel claims that the process of fashion change requires a differentiated society. While it is generally accepted and is established more or less universally that fashion is essentially about change, Simmel notes that, ‘like all phenomenon it has the tendency to conserve energy’⁸⁰. Alongside change, there is also a permanency of change in fashion, and it is this permanency that ensures that

⁷⁷ Simmel 1904.

⁷⁸ Simmel 1904.

⁷⁹ Johnson, et al., 2003.

⁸⁰ Simmel (1904: 47)

fashion repeatedly returns to old forms, that is best illustrated in the 'coming back to fashion' of certain styles of clothing. It is this aspect of fashion that has been likened to that of a cyclical course, and has of ten been the subject of enquiry for many surveys of modern fashion.

It is also noteworthy to mention, that for imitation to occur it has to be in fact sanctioned; in others words, it must be 'allowed' to occur⁸¹. Imitation, thus, implies the thrust towards equality making it characteristic of a modern democratic social system. Therefore, it may be asserted with confidence that for fashion to flourish, it demands a society, not bowed down with rigid hierarchies, instead one with fluidity in its structures. One of the most crucial differences, in as far as fashion escalation is concerned, between the era of feudalism and nineteenth century consumption, is the fact of the latter being an open and flexible society, with emphasis on achieved statuses as opposed to ascribed ones. The significance of class remained of paramount importance, but the possibility of 'passing off' of as gentry, gaining admission into the elite circles converted fashion into a stepping stone and thereby increasing its practical relevance manifold. Herein lies the irony of modernity; while fashion seemingly shattered the austerity of the aristocratic society, with its deference to class, by pushing forward towards a classless society, (in this case through fashion) towards a more open and fluid system of stratification, it nevertheless, ensured through its repetition that the lines it attempted to erase remained constant – only people seemed to change places. Thus, fashion in this period remains governed by the social strategy of class. The role of class in fashion has been touched upon by many scholars⁸² and in the present age, it has been used one again by Bourdieu⁸³ as a marker of, what he calls, taste.

Let me digress for a while; yet another paradox that constitutes fashion has been described succinctly by Simmel in his account of 'individuality and social forms'⁸⁴ defining the simultaneous need in fashion for both generality and individuality. In other words while fashion depicts ones shared values and ideals, it also essential for a

⁸¹ Spencer (1896 cited in Kawamura 2005

⁸² Spencer 1896; Veblen 1899; Simmel 1904.

⁸³ Bourdieu 1984.

⁸⁴ Frisby & Featherstone 1997.

truly fashionable man (or woman) to distinguish themselves from the crowd. This is fashion's fundamental dialogue between structure and agency.

Tracing this idea to the nineteenth century, this phenomenon was articulated in the 'tension between clothes as revealing and clothes as concealing of identity'⁸⁵. Self improvement was the key to greatness, and the problem lay in the masking of identity or its transparency. "The clothes we choose to wear represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires".⁸⁶ In other words, "The current fashion is strictly observed so that the individual appearance never clashes with the general style, but always stands out from it"⁸⁷.

For Simmel, fashion is riddled with paradoxes that in fact reflect the antagonistic nature of our existence and even find strength in the contradictory forces that it encounters. Man is a dualistic being, and every aspect of his biological, psychological, philosophical and moral life is based upon the conflict of opposing forces. For instance, philosophically, it is reflected in the antagonism between cosmotheism and the inherent differentiation separate existence of every cosmic element, while on practical grounds the hostility between individualism and socialism. Whatever it may be, it is always one and the same fundamental form of duality that is expressed on the one hand, as the general, the uniform, or seen as the inactive similarity of forms, and on the other it hand, it stands for motion, for the differentiation of separate elements that produces the restless development of one individual aspect of life into another⁸⁸. Such a play of forces is equally present in the social sphere of life, one that is best articulated in the fluctuating temperament of fashion. It is within the sphere of this argument that Simmel introduces the idea of imitation – imitation refers to that act of generality that gives an individual the assurance of not standing alone, and makes him a part of the whole. Thus imitation represents one half of our dual natures, that which absorbs the individual into the general, and 'emphasises the permanent element in change'. However, herein lies the irony, even when one wants to look fashionable, it does not take away the desire to elevate oneself from the mob, and so one wants to be

⁸⁵ Sennet (1977), Finkelstein (1991) cited in Entwistle 2000.

⁸⁶ Finkelstein 1991: 122; *ibid.*)

⁸⁷ Simmel 1904.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

fashionable and at the same time stand out. It is this desire that reflects the other aspect of the duality, that is, need for 'differentiation, distinction, change and individual contrast'. Fashion thereby ascertains a place for itself among many other phenomenon through which the dualistic play of connection and differentiation of human life are illustrated. It is an odd situation; Simmel humours the reader by comparing the situation to the formation of a club of club haters! This performs two functions, firstly, it emphasises the essence of the present more than any other phenomenon by making a clear division between what was yesterday and what will be tomorrow, and secondly, it reifies the class aspect of fashion⁸⁹.

Structuralism and Post modernism

Society does not remain in a static state and as there are changes within it, there emerges a need to rethink the theoretical models which are used to study it. For the same reason we find that there has been a significant shift in fashion theory since the nineteenth century writings of Spencer and Veblen. Today it is important to recognise that the directional flows of fashion are not uni linear, rather they move in a multitude of directions making it multi dimensional and multi faceted. Keeping these changes in mind one accepts the fact that meanings in contemporary fashion are subject to interpretations and are being constantly negotiated in social processes and coded into various fashion items.

The turn to structuralism within the social sciences took place during the post second-world war period and especially in France where the twentieth century linguist scholars, Jacobson and Chomsky appeared on the forefront.⁹⁰ These scholars inspired by the work of the earlier linguist Saussure emphasise the idea of underlying deep structures that were used to communicate meanings without having to explicitly state the rules of grammar. With this approach researchers have systematically analyses relationships in order to discover and interpret meanings of cultural acts and products.⁹¹

⁸⁹ There is not a unified acceptance of class as a setter of fashion, but for the sake of convenience, we argue it through for a while, as it is also important to remember that for the time that Simmel points to, fashion might have been more impacted with class.

⁹⁰ Bocoock 1993.

⁹¹ Lillethun (2007: 79)

Structuralists treated texts objectively that is texts with a structure, but not as authored pieces whose meaning was to be grasped by trying to work out the what the intention of the author might have been. This aspect has important implications for the study of modern consumption (and indeed fashion, *mine*) and in the analysis of the advertisements which seem to be necessary part of modern consumerism.⁹² (Bocock 1993)

The monumental work by Barthes in this regard is important and deserves a mention. For Barthes what must be of great importance to a sociologist is not the age old dilemma leading to the change of dress as ornamentation from protection, rather, he must take into account the tendency of every bodily covering to become the part of an organised, normative system that is recognised by society.⁹³ It is this system that he calls the vestimentary system and that fashion as a system operates on the basis of this system. Fashion therefore is governed with a set of rules and patterns and no meaning nor importance is assigned to individual acts of 'creativity'. To elaborate his point further, he cites the following example,

“If a woman places a flower in her hair this remains a fact of pure and simple adornment, so long as the use of (such as the flower on the head of a bridegroom’s crown) or the positioning (such as a flower over the ear in a gypsy dress) have not been dictated by social group, as soon as this happens it becomes part of dress.”⁹⁴

Since Saussure we know that language, like dress, is both a system and history, an individual act and a collective institution. Language and dress are at any moment in history, complete structures, constituted organically by a functional system of norms and forms.⁹⁵ Therefore, individual notions of creativity loose out in place of a system. Fashion can now be understood in terms of the social, that is, as an institution and not as an aesthetic product. The historian and the sociologist are not only concerned with the study of taste or style, rather their job is to list, coordinate and explain what is

⁹² Bocock 1993.

⁹³ Barthes 2006.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.7.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

prohibited, tolerated or allowed within the vestimentary system. Dress, here is, 'essentially part of the axiological order.'⁹⁶

Fashion is always part of dress; but its origins can represent either of our two categories. Fashion can be part of dress object that has been artificially elaborated by specialists at one moment, like in haute couture, or it can be constructed by the propagation of a simple act of dressing that is then reproduced at the collective level and for a number of reasons.⁹⁷ The break with structuralism to some extent come with the work of the two French scholars who were ambivalent about call themselves structuralists but contributed in important ways to what may be called broadly a structuralist project and thereby helped create a break with the dogmatic forms of structuralism in order to develop what has been called Post modernism.⁹⁸

While the classical theorists have been succinct in defining fashion, there are certain changes in its scope and vision that requires a far more detailed look at its renewed form, especially since the mid twentieth century and the new millennium. The post modern approach to the problem of fashion is distinctly different from theories in the past. With changes in economy and lifestyles, fashion has acquired a status like never before. The industry and scope of fashion has expanded to a much larger scale than before – and the fashion has become multi-faceted. One sees in the second half of the 20th century the *cultural turn* resulted in the development of new approaches to understand culture this shift toward meaning focuses on processes within culture, how people practice their culture, and the objects of culture.⁹⁹ The work by Jean Lyotard explains that a rupture had occurred between modernity and postmodernity and that the beginning of the latter was marked by an end to belief in meta-narratives and universal truths. It questions myths, the power of authority and recognizes that cultural assumptions such as bias underlie all social interaction.¹⁰⁰

The American philosopher, Susanne Langer developed an approach to the concept of symbol which is useful to sociologists and anthropologists in general. She attempted

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Lillethun, 2007.

⁹⁸ Harland (1987 cited in Bocock 1993)

⁹⁹ Jameson 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Lillethun (2007: 80)

to write about symbolism and language, symbols in mathematic and logic, and in what she termed the 'non-discursive'. The latter is especially important for the analysis for the analysis of consumption. The non discursive she says derives from the idea that *presentational* symbols are of prime importance. She argued that there was meaning, albeit of a moral and emotional kind, in the works of artists, in magic, in rituals and so on, unlike the positivists who restricted 'meaningfulness' to logic, science and mathematics. Langer argued that Homo sapiens as distinct from other species has a capacity for forming symbols and not merely signs.¹⁰¹ Langer articulated her argument in terms of 'needs' but her position is not necessarily with the assumptions made by Baudrillard who was critical of the notion of 'need'. Both then operated with the idea that's symbols are central to human activities and that man is a symbol producing and symbol using species.¹⁰²

Concluding Remarks

It is interesting to note therefore the variety of perspectives that have emerged in sociology to explain the nature of fashion. From the theories of Veblen to those of Langer, one notes a distinct shift in the manner in which change in fashion has been theorised, and helps put to reason the different ways in which it exists.

The next section of the study will look into the emergence of modern Western fashion and try to explain how it has been significant in shaping the industry of the current times.

¹⁰¹ Bocoock (1997: 70)

¹⁰² Ibid, p.71.

CHAPTER 2

Western Fashion: Modernity's Child

Introduction

The sartorial consciousness of mankind today is indeed one that needs no introduction. The hoardings at subways, the fashion magazines at the local newsstand, the glittering malls next door, the flea market replicas, all speak a plain truth – that the fashion industry is at its crest and its effects are seen to be piercing through societies of both the east and west. However, twenty first century fashion is not an overnight phenomenon; it has developed gradually with many twists and turns over the centuries, inching forward into the glitzy boulevard flaunting the Armanis and Chanel's that we recognise today.

This work begins with a quotation by Ibn Khaldun¹⁰³, the famous medieval scholar who once remarked, '*it should be known that history is a discipline with a great number of approaches*'. This aphorism although more than seven hundred years is one that helps keep alive the multiplicity of history. Like all other histories, modern Western fashion too lies enmeshed in a quagmire of events and occurrences, a number of which have been taken up by scholars to explain it in its present condition. And having said that, it is pertinent to mention that there are a number of points at which there is much debate regarding the origin of fashion and dress. It is seen that the line of demarcation between the two phenomena, that is, the origins of fashion and dress, seem to be blurred at places and crystal clear at others. Numerous studies have attempted at an investigation that throws light on the development of the two. Truly scientific research on dress started in about 1860 with work by scholars and archivists like Quicherat, Demay or Entart¹⁰⁴. Their principal method was to treat dress as the sum of individual pieces and the garment itself as a kind of historical event; this made possible an enquiry regarding the birth of the garment and the circumstances

¹⁰³ Khaldun (1377: 15)

¹⁰⁴ Barthes (2006: 3)

surrounding its birth. Whereas others like Kawamura¹⁰⁵ have observed that, while clothes are universal fashion is not. It is the product of a certain kind of society which has allowed it to grow and flourish under its particular conditions. Kawamura¹⁰⁶ goes on to say that while clothes are as old as the history of mankind, fashion as a specific system of garment developed specifically in the *west*.

This section follows the approach of the latter, and in doing so, attempts in an exploration of the birth of fashion, by looking into significance of the two terms: west and modern. This section uses these two indexes and their corollaries to trace the history of fashion.

The main theme that this section attempts to explore, deals with the development of this acute awareness of fashion over the world by looking into the historical facts surrounding its evolution. Therefore, it becomes imperative to ask the question, wherefrom comes sartorial fashion?

Thus, the attempt here is to trace the history of modern western fashion by looking at it through the kaleidoscope of modernity. There is a very large and respectable body of work by sociologists, historians, art historians and the like who pin down the birth of the fashion phenomenon as a project of modernity. I borrow this framework for the present paper as I endeavour to unravel the history behind the workings of fashion as a powerful organised system.

In the light of the above statements the development of fashion and its industry in the modern western society maybe studied using the methods of a historical sociology. For this purpose, a number of factors must be cited, some of which are historical¹⁰⁷. However like all other histories, this one too, to state the obvious can not be written, neither read, in black or white. Histories cannot be understood as air tight compartments as they are not exhaustive; therefore, the study begins with the knowledge of having certain subjective dimensions to the histories that are being traced. In tracing a history of fashion, the study has chosen certain moments in history

¹⁰⁵ Kawamura 2005.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Carr 1961.

which are more definitive than others and have had considerable weight in shaping it to its current condition.

Etymology:

The English word 'fashion' originally comes from *facere* which is Latin for 'make'. *Facio* or *factio* refers to making or doing¹⁰⁸ or fashioning something, as in, 'fashioning a skirt of grasses for a much dishevelled doll', or 'he succeeded in fashioning two massive hardwood hinges'¹⁰⁹. Here, we understand fashion as giving shape to something or forming something. The second aspect to the meaning of fashion refers to its association with the present. For this sense of the word, fashion finds its roots, not surprisingly in a term that denotes the present or 'now' - this word is 'modern'. The word 'modernity' was coined by the English philosopher and divine George Hakewell in the mid seventeenth century to describe the quality or condition of being 'in the present' rather a part of the decaying past¹¹⁰. It is from this usage that the phrase 'up to date' or the experience of 'feeling modern' finds its roots from. Novelty is seen as a crucial part of fashion. Koenig¹¹¹ refers to ardent fashion followers as 'neophilia' stating that humankind receptiveness for anything new is, among other aspects, in some way essential to fashion-oriented behaviour. In a similar strain Barthes¹¹², equates fashion to neomania, a phenomenon that he judges to have appeared with the birth of capitalism. Breward and Evans¹¹³ note that while many writers have paid lip service to the role of fashion in modernity, only few address their relationship in detail. It cites Lehmann¹¹⁴, who founds that the etymologies of the French words for fashion and modernity, *la mode* and *modernite*, are infact same! This is how fashion has come to be understood as the prevailing style or custom, the accepted aesthetic which defines what is beautiful or tasteful within certain time and space.

¹⁰⁸ (Barnard 1996; Brennkmeier 1962: 2 cited in Kawamura 2005)

¹⁰⁹ E.R.Burroughs: 1912.

¹¹⁰ Breward & Evans (2005: 2)

¹¹¹ Koenig (1973 cited in Kawamura 2005)

¹¹² Barthes 2006.

¹¹³ Breward & Evans: 2005.

¹¹⁴ Lehmann (2001 cited in Breward & Evans 2005)

Situating the Study¹¹⁵:

Fashion is not an isolated phenomenon; it is entrenched in the political, economic, cultural and even moral bearings of society. To capture its zeitgeist requires more than a simple understanding of its economics. To accept this approach is to recognise fashion as a consequence of the enormous social and cultural changes that took place in Europe broadly in the four hundred years from the reign of Louis the XIV and the Industrial Revolution in Britain. However, Slater points to a historiographical barrier in addressing this issue. This is because the two approaches that have been commonly appropriated for explaining the history of fashion contradict each other.¹¹⁶

The first approach that is seen in most Whiggish tradition views the Industrial Revolution as the means through which the fashion industry gains momentum. This explanation looks at production as the essence of modernity. This 'productivist bias' as it is often called has a serious corollary. Looking at the birth of consumerism, and capitalism indeed as a 'result' of the industrial revolution means that consumer culture chronologically follows industrialisation. The argument upon which this understanding is based is that they view culture as an after-effect of economic surplus. For a culture to prosper or indeed to take birth there must be according to this view, a certain level of accumulated material wealth. Unless this is so, all human societies would restrict consumption to the bare minimum, henceforth, non-cultural needs. Slater illustrates this point through the specimen of the nineteenth century bourgeois and the twentieth century Soviet elite with their puritan work oriented ethic as opposed to a state of modern hedonism.

Alternately, there emerged another perspective that severely questioned the 'productivist bias'; one that argued in favour of the Consumer Revolution as preceding the Industrial Revolution, making the former a central and early ingredient of western modernisation. This view looks at developments as early as the sixteenth century (possibly even earlier), that help shape modern fashion. It is during this period that one can discern a new 'world of goods' amongst which sartorial fashion played a

¹¹⁵ This section is based upon the work done Don Slater in his book titled 'Consumer Culture and Modernity, 1997, Polity Press Publication.

¹¹⁶ Slater 1997.

very important role. The aspect of taste begins to emerge in this period, as well as the importance of achieved as opposed to ascribed statuses. Also, one sees at this time the development of infrastructures, organisations and practices that target new kinds of markets like the rise of shopping as a leisure activity, advertising and new ways of marketing.

This revisionism started by addressing a contemporary Keynesian question regarding the eighteenth century. The central question that this approach aimed to answer points to the manner in which the idea and the practice of consumption got transformed and re-valued during the eighteenth century and became a question of taste. Early capitalism pushed for consumerism and hence for fashion. Because fashion is essentially about change and is never constant, it became impossible to be fashionable unless one kept up with the changes. Unlike the previous period when there was little change by way of seasonal trends, early modernity saw a flush of the first taste of capitalism, one that has fine tuned over the decades.

This revisionist approach tries to see the consumer revolution as one that preceded the industrial one. The author says it is beneficial to see both, as a part of a commercial revolution in which concepts of trade, money, new financial instruments and moveable property, contracts and orientation to commercial exploitation of ever more extensive and impersonal markets generated vast range of new notions and activities that we deem modern. This paper broadly uses the second approach, within doing away with the importance of the first one. We need to see the emergence of fashion as a combined result of production and consumption.

Why West?

It is commonly acknowledged that modern fashion is Western fashion; western because we find the roots of this phenomenon steeped within the social cultural and political milieu of the times. Fashion can be understood as consumption and although the exact date of its origin has been highly debated upon, yet we find that it is in the early modern period in the west that it all began. Fashion emerged as a part of the

West's assertion of its own difference from the rest of the world as progressive, rational and free.¹¹⁷

Project Modernity:

It is important to understand the meaning of fashion in relation to modernity. The history of fashion like that of modernity is one that has been interpreted differently by individual scholars. While both can be studied in terms of their corporeal aspects, they are also abstract classificatory systems that escape definitive demarcations. Elizabeth Wilson captures very succinctly the ambiguities of the phenomenon in the following words –

Modernity is an imprecise, yet all-embracing concept. It can be seen as an umbrella term that is used to indicate everything about the period since the industrial and French revolutions. Indeed it can be extended further back to a period of 'early modernity' that equates with the rise of mercantile and agricultural capitalism. Either way however, whether originating the 16th C or 18th, the term modernity refers more to a zeitgeist than a clearly defined epoch. It is a general term or label for an epoch, the parameters of which are highly elastic¹¹⁸.

Since modernity is an abstract classificatory system, it is one that has been understood with the help of a number of different perspectives. Firstly, the term modernity is largely confined to the development of consumer culture in the wake of the 18th and 19th century industrialization. Similar to fashion its effects are intimately concerned with the relationship between the processes of production and consumption. Taking this argument further, the modern fashion system also strengthens the complex mechanism of money, another factor commonly associated with the rise of modernity. Secondly, modernity has also been used as a 'politically neutral' term for capitalism and yet, at the same time, it encompasses much more than mere economics. To understand fashion through modernity's paradox is to comprehend its duplicity; while the Age of Reason blossomed, its irrationality grew simultaneously in leaps and

¹¹⁷ Entwistle 2000.

¹¹⁸ Wilson (2003 cited in Breward & Evans 2005: 16)

bounds. This approach has been used by a number of historians who see the ideals of modernity as tied up with the growth of the industrial capital society as a form of rupture from the preceding social systems. Viewing it from this angle modernity can be seen as encompassing the enormous social and cultural changes that took place from the mid sixteenth century onwards in Europe. However, there are a number of criticisms for this approach in as far understanding fashion is concerned.

Definitions of modernity also differ significantly between the social sciences and the humanities. A number of historians for whom the idea of modernity is bound up with an analysis of industrial capital society as a form of rupture from the preceding social system, have used the term to designate the enormous social and cultural changes which took place from the mid sixteenth century onwards in Europe¹¹⁹ Yet another perspective that may be pointed out is that of Max Weber. He writes that the origins of capitalism lay in the protestant ethic; its leitmotifs were modernisation and rationalisation but also, and crucially, ambiguity. The sense of ambiguity underlies an important presumption that there is an intimate connection between opposites such as despair and optimism, beauty and horror, fashion and morality¹²⁰.

It maybe argued that it is only in the post modern era that the fashion system has matured; yet, the growth of fashion is intricately bound up with modernity as a whole. This is because firstly the core institutions, infrastructures and practices associated with fashion arose in the early modern period. Consumer culture is not a late consequence of industrial modernization; it is not something that followed after the intellectual and industrial labours of modernity. Secondly, fashion is a child of flux and not tradition; it is born of the modern experience and of the modern social atmosphere.

Fashion is inextricably linked with the development of the doctrine of individuality and this notion the self outside the limitations of community, rank and status also finds its roots in modernity. Carr¹²¹ mentions the familiar account in Burkhardt's civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy, the cult of the individual began with the

¹¹⁹ Turner 1999 cited in Evans 2003)

¹²⁰ Evans 2003.

¹²¹ Carr 1961.

Renaissance, when man who had previously been conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people party family or corporation , at length became a spiritual individual and recognised himself as such. Later thus cult was associated with the rise of capitalism, and of Protestant ethic, with the beginning of the industrial revolution, and with the doctrine of Laissez-faire. The rights of man and the citizen proclaimed by the French revolution were the rights of the individual. Individualism was the basis of the great nineteenth century philosophy of utilitarianism. Whether or not this spirit of individualism has been retained through the 21st century is debatable. We find on the hand a larger variety of acceptables, a more self-centric world, yet if man has truly been able to emancipate himself or herself from the clutches of society is ambivalent.

The question that has often been asked is – What sort of a society is required for the birth of a fashion system; what are its preconditions and what are the factors ensuring its sustenance. While it is not easy to pin-point to a particular time in history of Western dress from whence a fashion system can be said to have begun, this chapter attempts to draw out those events that have moulded the modern fashion system

Pushing back further: Early Modernity

It is with the death of the feudal societies in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that we see the first traces of fashion, that is, a system of dress different from what existed earlier; although, Braudel¹²² notes that it was not before 1700 that fashion as a phenomenon really became widespread and was available to all classes of society. In an interesting analysis by Said¹²³, of the European encounter with the ‘exotic Other’ during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries shaped the destinies of many countries whose cheap natural resources were maraud that led to the establishment of fashion. There were trade routes that criss-crossed Europe and beyond, carrying silk and cotton from Italy, and wool from England to different corners of the continent. Steele¹²⁴ describes fourteenth century Italy with its trade in silk and cotton as a ‘proto-capitalist’, and one that was more cosmopolitan than any other country at that time.

¹²² Braudel (1981: 317)

¹²³ Said (1985 cited in Entwistle 2000: 85)

¹²⁴ Steele (1998: *ibid.*)

However, Italy's glory was short lived. With the reign of Louis XIV in France during the seventeenth century, France became the fashion capital of the world, an honour which it held on to for centuries to come.

During the Renaissance period, the princely courts gained importance like never before. It is believed that fashion was founded in these very courts, with the court of Louis XIV being exemplary of the detailed arrangements that ensued. Louis headed the French monarch for seventy two years, from 1638 to 1715, the longest reign of any European monarch and it was under his influence that began the closed world of courtly consumption, one whose purpose was possibly not only aesthetic pleasure, but more importantly an assertion of political power. While Louis is not always be applauded for his sagacity in wars, his hand in establishing France as the supreme trendsetter among the elite in Europe is doubtless; a distinction that the French have retained till date.

Mukherji¹²⁵ explains 'for Louis and his ministers who took French claims to greatness more than seriously, having both the Great Tradition and trends in fashion located so firmly in Italy was unacceptable', Louis set about the task of establishing France as the centre of the European civilisation, and amongst other things, the role of cultural leadership was seen to be of paramount importance. Steele¹²⁶ mentions the various attempts that were made by Louis to protect French textiles from the rival luxury fashion industry in Italy and Holland, particularly the silk weaving in France. Yarwood¹²⁷ mentions the heavy duties on foreign fabrics and precious metals along with incentives to help French manufacturers.

But fashion is not only about garments – today what is colloquially called 'attitude', something that adds an element of zing to a fashionable garment, might have something to do with a practice that originated a very long time ago. While it may be hazardous or even antagonistic to compare it with what was seen as etiquette in European courts, or as in the work of Elias, *politesse* or *civilite*, one does find an uncanny sort of a resemblance in the idea their being propriety in behaviour that

¹²⁵ Mukherji (1997: 101)

¹²⁶ Steele 1998

¹²⁷ Yarwood (1992 cited in Entwistle 2000)

enhanced fashion¹²⁸. Manners and etiquettes in the European courts, from the 14th century onwards, had become the means through which the social ladder could be ascended. Elias writes that during the reign of Louis XIV 'social tact, consideration for others and many related complexes' had become accepted customs of a higher kind of society. He quotes Voltaire who said of the age of Louis XIV. "The king succeeded in making of a hitherto turbulent nation a peaceful people dangerous only to its enemies.... Manners were softened...."¹²⁹ Elias refers to this as the civilisation process.

The main centre of fashion in those days was the court; and during the rule of Louis XIV, Steele¹³⁰ finds that the styles of the French court were being assiduously followed all over Europe – New fashions during this time needed the nod of approval from the king, and this was a must. It is interesting to note that while a rigorous code of conduct was seen to be a part of courtly fashion, later times in history, including the current age, document similar requirements, in terms of conduct that complement fashion or style. Therefore one is satisfied saying that court society induced in its members a sense of propriety in agreement with the current practices of high society behaviour that was essential in order to be fashionable. Therefore, here we establish the idea of fashion, not only through its physical manifestations, but also through a code of conduct that was restrictive. A more modern contemporary of the court, as Elias says, is the city – while courts were the representatives of the Renaissance city, after the Revolution this was replaced by the city; large cities. Here too, we observe a number of unwritten laws that govern the code of conduct of the fashionable city dweller, a theme that will be taken in the subsequent sections.

The above explanation was necessary as it helps create the mood in which it emerged. However, while the king in all his grandeur continued to dictate fashion, we find, as seen in the work of Entwistle and Steele, there also seemed to germinate in the heart of Paris a more genuine, a more modern fashion. It is believed that thousands of tailors and seamstresses worked simultaneously and new fashions began to take shape. It was an exciting and novel time, and it is from this time the role of the city in

¹²⁸ Goudblon & Mennel (ed.) (1998: 47)

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Steele 1998.

the making of fashion started to come into notice. However, one cannot forgo the prestige of the French court in fashion, and in spite of a lax in laws towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, figures like Madame Pompadour and Marie Antoinette ensured that the court remained the most significant trendsetter¹³¹.

The French Revolution and its Aftermath:

A moment that is held to be definitive in changing the course of history in Europe has been the French Revolution, and in the history of fashion too, it set the ball rolling in a manner that had not been seen previously.

The situation after the revolution, however, was very different from the past. In as far as fashion was concerned, the locked doors of the now fallen aristocracy were liberated and the city of Paris took over the role that was played by the French court in precedent. The thousands of dressmakers, seamstresses, and tailors who had formerly worked for the royal families and aristocracy found themselves unemployed in the city and consequently started boutiques in the city for anyone who could pay for their services. Herein begins yet another phase in fashion, one in which the role of money became all important; an aspect that has only amplified over the decades. Also, there was a substantive break in the association of fashion with rank, and from this time onwards one can see clearly the dynamics of social mobility etched in the practice of fashion.

For many historians at the start of the eighteenth century, Europe witnessed for the very first time a revolution of a new kind, a consumer revolution¹³². This period was marked with the entry of a host of new commodities that spelt luxury and opulence for the common man. It is at this time that the first traces of a modern consumerist culture is seen as the commodities purchased at this time were likely to be much beyond necessity. The fine line between want and need begins to blur here as we see the breakdown of the rigid social hierarchies in favour of a status revolution. Myriad articles such as furniture, silverware, clocks and personal items like perfumes,

¹³¹ Entwistle 2000

¹³² Entwistle 2000; Lury 1996.

kerchiefs, parasols and gloves became fashion items to possess. Brewer¹³³ finds that the possibilities of making public ones wealth along with 'social and sexual charms' was heightened with greater society.

This period also sees a number of entrepreneurs of leisure who organised activities such as sport, theatre and entertainment, assemblies, balls and masquerades, leisure and pleasure gardens and so on. With such an increase in social situations The novelty of all this was that these came for the first time with fee paying admission tickets. The role money as a means to an end begins to grow so that everything is available to anyone who can pay.

Yet another aspect of this period that needs mention is its contribution in bringing about new forms of business and commercial organisation. Mc Kendrick¹³⁴ in his breakthrough work points out to see the rise of marketing and consumer oriented retailing through examples such as Josiah Wedgewood's pottery industry. We find in these the vestiges of a modern fashion system.

Birth of the consumer culture:

Although consumption takes place in all human cultures, it is only in the present century that consumption on a truly mass scale has begun to appear as a foundational, rather than merely epiphenomenal, characteristic of society. When tracing consumerism, the key period might be seen as the 1950's but as McCracken¹³⁵ points out that it would be a mistake to assume that consumption had no important role to play before then. He locates two important moments in the expansion of consumerism in Europe that need a mention. Firstly, a consumer boom in Elizabethan England and secondly, an eighteenth century expansion in the fashionable use of consumer objects such as pottery. Since having socially 'correct' goods would grant social status, and if this standard was set by the upper classes, then it was understood using the emulation approach that the lower classes in the hierarchy would imitate as best as they could the consumption patterns of the former. But the question that remains unanswered

¹³³ Brewer 1997: 69 cited in Entwistle 2000: 99

¹³⁴ McKendric, et al.,1982.

¹³⁵ McCracken (1998 cited in Corrigan 2003)

here is one that is still asked frequently in contemporary fashion, that is, is fashion decided by the upper classes (or in the present context by the 'cultural intermediaries'¹³⁶ or is it that fashion is planted or influenced by agencies from outside¹³⁷. This is where marketing and advertising of products enter consumption culture. Josiah Wedgwood, owner of Wedgwood potteries in north Staffordshire, deliberately tried to direct upper class taste in the hope that he would be able to successfully manoeuvre the tastes of the lower classes as well as the latter would also try and acquire those goods which would present them to the world as people with good breeding and refinement.¹³⁸

The economic prosperity of England in the eighteenth century opened up a world of fashionable goods to ever more social classes, and it is at this historical point that McKendric¹³⁹ locate the beginnings of consumer society. It is here that we find a marked difference in the consumption patterns of the courtly society of Elizabethan England and Louis XIV of France, and it is here that we have the beginnings of *mass* consumption as opposed to the *elite* consumption of the earlier periods. It took until the late eighteenth century for the idea of consumption as a motor force of the economy to be accepted: 'as the growth of new wants stimulated increased effort and output, improved consumption by all ranks of society would further stimulate economic progress'¹⁴⁰.

The Role of the City after the Revolution:

The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvellous subjects. We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvellous; but we do not notice it."¹⁴¹

The revolution brought with it the promise of a new life, one that was, amongst other things increasingly urban in style and demeanor. The cities of London and Paris,

¹³⁶ Bourdieu 1984.

¹³⁷ Lang & Lang (1961 cited in Corrigan 2003)

¹³⁸ Corrigan (ibid: 9)

¹³⁹ McKendric, et al., 1982.

¹⁴⁰ (McKendric et al. (1982: 19 cited in Corrigan 2003: 8)

¹⁴¹ taken from Baudelaire 1846 essay 'The Salon of 1846' wherein he identifies the 'new forms of passion and the 'specific kinds of beauty' of the modern city.

along with the other capitals of Europe expanded like never before and were characterized by an unprecedented frenzy and restlessness that defined for all, the age that was to come. This was a period of great sociability¹⁴² and for the first time it opened up avenues for the formation of new acquaintances independent of royal control¹⁴³. In other words 'Society' became all important, that, in turn opened up avenues for greater social display along with shrewder 'impression management'.¹⁴⁴ One recalls vivid descriptions in the novels of the nineteenth century British authors Jane Austen and Henry James of the fashionable world of 'Society' whereby its members would aspire stay in the circle by courting the latest fashions and by painstakingly following the social calendar that marked the correct settings for every season. Pertinent here is to note the shift in the pivot of fashion from the princely courts to the city. The city was now the hub of the fashion world, and it was from the city that new fashions arose. It was a general practice for women when returning to the country from a visit to London or Paris, to bring back with them the latest fashions of the season: 'long sleeves or refashioned petticoats that were a rage in the city'.¹⁴⁵ Also, the flourishing of café's, coffee bars, like the famous Kit-Kat Club in London where people would frequently meet to discuss literature, art and politics exemplify the shift that came about with the appointment of the city as the new source of fashion. We also notice that the object of fine art from that of archiving royal courts had by this time moved on to the cities, and street life was the most exciting of them all. Sir Godfrey Kneller was the leading portrait painter of England during the early eighteenth century and among his works there consists of more than forty paintings of the Kit-Kat club. The magic of Paris by night was probably captured best by Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) in his rendering of the street cafe, "The Cafe Terrace on the Place du Forum". Van Gogh in a letter to his sister in 1888 wrote, "... a starlit night in Paris with the brightly lighted cafes of the Boulevard, and this is approximately the same subject I just painted."¹⁴⁶ References of this are innumerable - activities such as promenading, going to theatres and opera, that were once suitable for a small privileged set, now opened up to a greater audience than ever before¹⁴⁷ and what is

¹⁴² Entwistle 2000

¹⁴³ Sennet, (1977 cited in Entwistle, *ibid.*)

¹⁴⁴ Goffman 1959.

¹⁴⁵ Austen 1813.

¹⁴⁶ Van Gogh was mistaken, the story was Yvette by Maupassant. (Kroller-Muller Museum – Van Gogh Paintings)

¹⁴⁷ Brewer (1997 cited in Entwistle 2000)

most interesting in this coquetry with fashion was this, that one's ability to participate in such cultural activities depended not just on having adequate wealth, but also on looking distinguished and respectable. Therefore, it is understood that membership to 'Society' was to be attained through 'cultivated' sophistication. The aim was to achieve distinction, and this was possible only through making oneself appear cultivated both in manner and dress.

Fashion and Identity: Case of the Dandy and the Bohemian Romantic

Fashion and dress have a complex relationship to identity, and like everything else with regard to fashion, fashion as an element of representation is one that can be seen both as in the affirmative and the negative. This means that representation can be for both the real and the false, and it is this dialectic between the veracity of fashion as truthful representation and that as a guise that was felt most acutely in the modern city as it developed in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. Although a simplistic tool in understanding a complex time in history, ¹⁴⁸ shows how in the discourses of the dandy in the 18th and the Romantic bohemian of the 19th century show to us the two aspects of fashion as representation, that is, fashion as artifice and authenticity.

This section returns to the theme of the nineteenth century city as the centre of fashion to expatiate further on the subject. As with modernity's paradox, we see in the nineteenth century city a similar contradictory state, that demonstrated the drama of the city by focusing on the dress as indicators to be read for meaning. Along with the explosion of the capital cities of Europe, there was a sudden growth of anonymity, and the city streets became an unknown and mysterious space. Two strategies emerged as a result of this¹⁴⁹. Firstly the idea that character is immanent in appearance and the alternative desire for artifice through the medium of disguise and fashion. The figures of the romantic and the dandy, respectively, play out this constant tension that characterised the nineteenth century European city.

With the acute escalation in the size and population of the cities there came a break in the previously naive sociability of the earlier generation. There was a sense of

¹⁴⁸ Entwistle 2000.

¹⁴⁹ Entwistle 2000

heightened suspicion regarding people at face value and a need to probe beneath the surface came to be seen as essential. The Victorian era that gave rise to the detective novel and the murder mystery show to us the an aspect of fashion that was characterised by Simmel's notion of the 'blaze attitude' wherein the individual tried to survive in the impersonal city by adopting an attitude of indifference, and not letting the world see through the real self. This may be illustrated through Baudelaire's notion of the *flaneur*.

The dandy constitutes a fascinating figure in the history of fashion. A number of debates, discussions have been initiated that prove how in understanding the dandy one is able to comprehend some the complexities of fashion. It is this time in history when one sees the making of self-made men, whose claim to fame, was not their ascribed statuses rather, their achievements through their personas, their wit, their impeccable aesthetic taste and their flawless style. We welcome the figure of the dandy here¹⁵⁰.

The character of the dandy is one that has attracted much attention from the common man as well from sociologist. With the French revolution men's clothing changed drastically, both in form and spirit.¹⁵¹ It is seen that although social classes had been defeated politically they continued to reign in spirit. With the adoption of the Quaker model and the suit-pant system coming into the picture and the thorough democratization of dress at least in principle, there arose a need for a method in which differences could be played out less ostentatiously than before. With the call of *égalité* the aristocracy dropped its velvet and lace but class exclusivity continued to exist and we find that within the universal form of dressing that emerged a style of subtle whereby these differences in class could be manifested through tacit detailing. Barthes emphasizes the importance of detailing, and the notion of taste as a marker of distinction, a fact that aimed to work within a universal system of vestimentary codes to distinguish class. He makes a very significant point drawing from the figure of the dandy. He assigns to the dandy the birth of the new aesthetic category – the detail. It was through subtle detailing that the classes kept their distance from others and it was

¹⁵⁰ The most famous being Beau Brummel, who was able to abandon his humble background for a life that marked with leisure and style

¹⁵¹ Barthes 2006.

the discreet weapon to highlight the narrowest of social differences.¹⁵² (This design of subtlety gives rise to yet another aspect of fashion that is discussed in great detail by Bourdieu- taste.) The detail is predecessor of the detailing that we see today in the Western fashion system, and especially in women's clothing. Ironic it is however, as Barthes points out that although born for the sake of fashion alone, the dandy finds its certain death with the growth of fashion in its present avatar.

Colin Campbell tries to under why consumers actually consume in the way they do in a more 'idealist' way¹⁵³. A point common to modern production and consumption lies in the fact that they both represent break with tradition. Campbell argues that the fixity of traditional societies meant that one could learn the actual patterns of consumption since there were only a limited number of items that entered into consumer consciousness, and hence it was possible to learn the proper modes of consuming. But with the advent of the modern society and with its corollary patterns of consumption there came a break in this possibility of *learning to consume*. The change may be encapsulated in the term 'desire' or the 'want to want' that is, a want for new and different things in an endless pattern of discontent¹⁵⁴. Consumption in industrial societies is not merely a matter of rational calculation, as an economist might imagine, nor is it a matter of an irrational impulse, as some psychologists might fantasize. Campbell sees it rather as based upon a strong sense of duty, 'an obligation to engage in "want satisfaction" as an end in itself'.¹⁵⁵ It is here that the study returns to the ethics of romanticism as a movement to explain modern consumerism. Since the romanticism started as a reaction against industrial society and all it stood for, it pushed for the idea of an individual as a distinct and autonomous being, replacing the old idea of the individual that 'emphasized the commonality of mankind'.¹⁵⁶ The individual becomes understood as something divorced from society, and its job comes to be the development of its own uniqueness- this, indeed, becomes a duty. The Romantic was duty bound to rebel against constraints, for only without constraints could individuals freely experience

¹⁵² Barthes 2006.

¹⁵³ Campbell (1983 cited in Corrigan 2003: 9)

¹⁵⁴ Corrigan 2003.

¹⁵⁵ Campbell (1983: 284 cited in Corrigan 2003: 11)

¹⁵⁶ Campbell 1983: 285

all the world had to offer¹⁵⁷. It is this hedonistic attitude of the romantic that is compared to the modern hedonism of contemporary times that constitutes what is popularly termed consumerism.

Conclusion

Fashion as consumerism is a part of the wider material culture that has existed in the past. Whether or not there is a break between traditional forms of material culture and the modern ones is a topic of debate. Douglas and Isherwood, an anthropologists and economists respectively suggest that consumption as it occurs in societies is beyond commerce, that it is a matter of both culture and of economics. "They suggest that it is possible to see continuities in the ways in which individuals make social meanings through their use of material goods in traditional as well as modern societies. This argument is important in so far as it points to continuities between traditional and modern societies; in doing so, it challenges the often exaggerated differences between them. However in its emphasis on the apparent timelessness nature of ritual, it ignores contrasts between different world of things and the social lives they make possible. Yet another anthropological approach has been offered by Marshall Sahlins who uses the concept of totemism to analyse Western consumption, especially clothing and food. He argues that modern societies have substituted manufactured objects for species or natural objects. In other words, manufactured objects acts as totems in the modern world; and consumer groups are like tribes in traditional societies. It communicates the supposed 'delicacy' of women, the supposed 'strength' of men, the supposed 'refinement' of the upper classes, and the supposed 'vulgarity' of the lower classes. Clothing can thus be seen to communicate the properties that are supposed to inhere in each of these categories and that serve as the basis for their discrimination. While Sahlins, like Douglas and Isherwood point to the similarities between traditional and modern societies, he is also identifies certain differences. He says that in the case of the modern totems, there is the possibility of a 'Godlike' manipulation which renders it much stronger. It is this point that is very important as it looks at how industrialisation and other aspects of modernisation have transformed material culture.

¹⁵⁷ Corrigan 2003.

CHAPTER 3

Sartorial Fashion in Postmodern Times

With the ushering in of the 1960's one sees a rapid changes in the order of things, be it in the realm of politics, economy or culture. It is therefore within this culture of flux that one has to locate the fashion industry of the millennium, as one distinctly different from the past. What separated the ensuing fashion industry from previous times is probably the fact that unlike in the past the scope and character of fashion has broadened manifold. A number of twentieth century influences can be held responsible for this change, making sartorial fashion an extremely complex phenomenon to interpret. Today, the fashion industry is no longer a unified entity; rather it is kaleidoscopic in nature, operating at multiple levels for a motley crowd. A small example that hints at the orbit along which fashion operates is its terminology. It brings to light the dynamics of contemporary fashion, demonstrating how fashion and anti-fashion negotiate, complement and contradict each other to create new levels and aesthetics of beauty. One can think of the 'modern classic, the sporty natural, the funky urbanite, the trendy fashionista, the artistic eclectic, the bohemian hippie, the indo-chic' and so on, as different markers of fashion, with each existing in its designated space and time. A number of factors have inspired these looks and continue to do so. For instance, in art the influences of surrealism, Dadaism and cubism have impacted sartorial fashion considerably, within the scope of culture the hippies have leave their vibrancy, colour and eclecticism, in the social realm, various movements like the increasing importance of the afro, the explosion of the Asian aesthetic, the sexual revolution, have all left their footprints in the fashion that has emerged. This proliferation of the fashion aesthetic is a curious phenomenon and it has led to much debate regarding the nature of fashion itself - the question that is often asked today is whether fashion in the new millennium is really fashion or is it just an imitation of fashion? Also, the terrific speed with which fashion, amongst other things, travels via the network society has led to a new type of society wherein exclusivity of fashion itself has begun to be questioned. Kitsch is what rules the market, and kitsch is what the masses want. With its all encompassing aesthetic can it

be said that fashion has died, or is this expansion of fashion a true reflection of its dynamism?

The Post Modern condition¹⁵⁸

Before one is to look into the means of transmission and dissemination of the term post modern, it is perhaps wise to take stock of the range of differences that this term encompasses.¹⁵⁹ With the cultural turn that has characterised the twentieth century, there has arisen a need for the development of new approaches to understand the changes that have marked society. Fashion as a phenomenon is rooted within the culture of twentieth century capitalism and it is within this paradigm that it should be studied. Post modernism focuses on the very processes of this culture, looking into the ways in which people practice their culture and create objects of culture.¹⁶⁰ It becomes pertinent to make sense of this culture of consumption and locate the fashion industry a culture that entails an individualism to turn into a consumer.

The work by Jean Lyotard explains that a rupture has occurred between modernity and postmodernity and that the beginning of the latter is marked by an end to belief in meta-narratives and universal truths.¹⁶¹ It questions myths, the power of authority and recognizes that cultural assumptions such as bias underlie all social interaction. This movement comes in opposition to the ideas of the late nineteenth and twentieth century German social scientists¹⁶² who contrast modernity to the traditional order and imply the progressive economic and administrative rationalisation and differentiation of the social world. These processes brought into being the modern capitalist-industrial state and are often viewed from a distinctly anti modern perspective.¹⁶³ Consequently, to speak of postmodernity is to suggest an epochal shift or break from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organizing principles. As with the pairing modernity – postmodernity, it is pertinent to look into the meanings of the modernism and post modernism. According

¹⁵⁸ This section is not a reference to Jameson's (1984) book of the same name, rather, it is an exploration of the theme of post modernism within the broader framework of consumerism and fashion.

¹⁵⁹ Featherstone (1991: 3)

¹⁶⁰ Jameson 1998.

¹⁶¹ Lyotard 1984.

¹⁶² Weber ; Simmel 1904.

¹⁶³ Featherstone (1991: 3)

to scholars, the term postmodernism was first used by Frederico de Onis in the 1930's to indicate a minor reaction to modernism¹⁶⁴. The term became popular in the 1960's in New York when it began to be used by young artists, writer, critics such as Rauschenberg, Cage, Burroughs, Barthelme, Fielder, Hassan and Sontag to refer to a movement beyond the 'exhausted' high modernism which was rejected because of its institutionalization in the museum and the academy. It gained wider usage in architecture, the visual, performing arts, music and fashion with the coming of the 1970's onwards.¹⁶⁵

The alleged break in modernity that has given way to post modernism makes for an interesting dialogue. If one is to examine the definitions of postmodernism, it is clearly evident the emphasis that it lays upon the effacement of the boundaries between high art and everyday life, and the collapse of the distinction between high art and mass/ popular culture, a stylistic promiscuity favoring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface 'depthlessness' of culture, is crucial to the understanding of sartorial fashion in the present context.¹⁶⁶ This is a point of greatest importance with reference to post modernism in the fine arts and sartorial fashion.

Interestingly, post modernism expresses at one level the horror at the destructive excess of Western consumerist society, yet, in aestheticising this horror, it somehow converts it into a pleasurable object of consumption.¹⁶⁷ Fashion consumption today, has moved ahead of simplistic sale and purchase, instead, the role of desire in consumption has become of paramount importance. The role of desire in modern consumption has become very important, for without consumers, or potential consumers, becoming socialized in a manner such that they can seek satisfaction of their desires in consumer goods and experiences; and it is through this process that the social and cultural relations which sustain the economic system of modern capitalism are able to survive.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ (Kohler [1977] and Hassan [1985] cited in Featherstone [1991])

¹⁶⁵ Featherstone (1991: 7)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid: 65.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson (1992: 4 cited in Craik 1994: 8)

¹⁶⁸ Featherstone 1991.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the globalizing economy and increasing communication facilities ensured changes in the fashion system that were never seen before. This has led to changes in economy and lifestyles of individuals over the globe with fashion acquiring a status like never before. The scope of fashion has expanded to a much larger scale than before resulting in a multi faceted fashion industry. Marshall McLuhan writes in the 1960's about the futuristic global electronic village where time and space collapse allowing humans easy and fast communication. Five decades have passed since then, and one might deem his prophecy as accurate especially when one observes the trends that have characterised the fashion industry since then. It is somehow not an exaggeration to claim that the industry has taken aid of new technologies whether in the realm of production or distribution. Radio, cinema, television and the internet have all played their roles in the promotion of styles and the targeting of specific markets based on age, gender or lifestyles. This has further aided in the proliferation of fashion, whereby the dissemination of new fashions that are planted by the industry are able to reach a much larger audience than before. In addition to this, with greater access the masses are also able to put forward their own styles, and street fashions and underground cults have come to the surface resulting in greater visibility as well as influence. For example, the Peacock revolution¹⁶⁹ that originated in Carnby Street, London in 1968 gave a whole new meaning to colour, pattern and decoration in men's clothing. Although it did not last very long, the freedom of style and sense of individuality that developed during this period set the stage for the rest of the century.

Mahon points out McLuhan's¹⁷⁰ contribution to the understanding of the role of media in post modern fashion¹⁷¹. In "The Extensions of Man" (1964), Marshall McLuhan presents a radical view of the world, claiming that the new technologies of the modern age are creating a global village that is radically altering the way in which people live and visually experience the world. The role of the designer today is changing in more ways than one. For instance, the question of creativity is getting drawn out further and further from conventional patterns and resources, infact in order to sell, a designer

¹⁶⁹ The term peacock revolution was coined by former Esquire and Boston Globe columnist George Frazier . The king of Carnby street, designer/ tailor John Stephen influenced the world of popular music and dressed many like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. This event also marked the return of the unisex dandy look. (J. Goodman and Cohen, Consumer Culture: a reference handbook, 2003)

¹⁷⁰ McLuhan (1964: 177)

¹⁷¹ Mahon 2005.

must lay greater importance to the marketing of the garment (or any other product) rather than the actual design. What is crucial to success is branding – this is the reason why designer logos have become so important. Logos are the easiest way for each designer to impart a distinguishing characteristic to a lot of similar clothing.¹⁷² Also, artists are turning more and more to popular depiction of sex as a source of material: teen romance, soft porn magazines, television and film sex symbols and street fashion and advertising campaigns based on the sex appeal of consumer goods. While the sexual revolution came about during the 1960's, what also emerged at the same time was the highly erotic Playboy magazine that came to the fore of Pop Art.¹⁷³

There is nothing natural about post modern consumption and it is through the media that the masses are able to learn a specific set of cultural symbols. It is through print, television and the world wide web, that these symbols of fashion are disseminated, and with the added advantage of mass production, the spread of the latest fashion has moved forward at a breakneck speed. Post Modern consumerism therefore depends upon its specific set of values becoming acceptable and comprehensible among sufficient groups of people so that sales of consumer products can be made. These consumption oriented values have to include those which either allow, or actively encourage the purchase of the goods and experiences on offer. They involve also developing capacity to understand, to respond to, the symbols that surround modern consumption. (Featherstone 1991) It also depends upon a set of symbols becoming comprehensible to potential consumers. These symbols cannot be simply imposed, they have to be in tune with the potential customers own ways of life if they are to be effective. Symbols therefore have to be in tune with the sensibilities of the people and this is the reason we have multiple fashion systems¹⁷⁴ and consequently a plethora of symbols that represent different ideas for different set of people.

¹⁷² Agins 1999.

¹⁷³ Mahon 2005.

¹⁷⁴ Multiple fashions represent the desires of different sets of people, for instance the growth of gay or lesbian fashion. Minority groups like these are also now becoming major trendsetters and we notice a shift from niche market segments to mainstream markets.

Introducing Kitsch

The term kitsch is of relatively recent origin.¹⁷⁵ According To Calinescu, it came into use into 1860's and 1870's in the jargon of painters and art dealers in Munich and was used to designate cheap artistic stuff.¹⁷⁶ Later the word entered other European languages and by the end of the 1920's 'kitsch' became an international expression. Some believe it derives from the English 'sketch' mispronounced by the Germans while others link it to the German verb *verkitschen* (to make cheap). The aesthetic complaints of the declining aristocracy in the epoch of the ancien régime offer an interesting comparison to the tragic dilemma faced by artists and art dealers in the bourgeois age of "kitsch", a word which appears to derive from the specialist milieu of early 20th century Munich where "sketches" were marketed out of economic necessity to American tourists: "The term 'kitsch' is nothing other than an expression for this tension between the highly formed tastes of the specialists and the undeveloped, unsure taste of mass society". Ludwig Giesz maintains that the origins of kitsch can be traced to the German word *kitschen* meaning *den Strassenschlam zusammenscharren*, literally, to collect rubbish of the street. In order to trace the history of kitsch, one might go back to France during the period following the French revolution when the aesthetic complaints of the declining aristocracy gave voice a the nostalgia for the past Elias (1998: 78) writes that we have entered the world of kitsch, an age of transition, with its 'expressions of anxiety and ambivalence regarding change, as well as contempt for decadence and lapses of taste among the politically defeated and disempowered'.

The paradoxical nature of fashion is further illustrated in the concept of the abovementioned kitsch and chic. Again, returning to Kulka, there have even been speculations that 'kitsch' comes from the inversion of the French *chic*.¹⁷⁷ The experts nevertheless do agree that ever since the word was coined, in the second half of the 19th century, it has borne distinctly negative connotations. Calinescu puts forward that no matter how we classify its context of use, kitsch always implies the notion of

¹⁷⁵ Kulka (1996: 18)

¹⁷⁶ Calinescu (1999: 234)

¹⁷⁷ Kulka (1996: 19)

aesthetic inadequacy¹⁷⁸. People often say that kitsch is sketchy, cheap, that it is artistic rubbish – the very opposite of chic. Should we survey the entries under kitsch in standard dictionaries we would find expressions like ‘worthless art’, pretentious art, artistic rubbish’ or simply bad art. Yet kitsch is by no mean coextensive with bad art. Though kitsch is bad, not all bad art is kitsch. There is something about kitsch that sets it apart from bad art.

There are two questions that need answering. Firstly, what does the mass appeal of kitsch consist of? And secondly, what does the aesthetic badness of kitsch consist of? A theory of kitsch must seek to answer these two questions as although kitsch has a strong mass appeal it is still regarded as aesthetically worthless. Using the category of kitsch categories of pop culture icons maybe analysed. One often hears that pop art has collapsed the very definition of kitsch and art. But if this is true and if Pop Art is a legitimate and respectable form of art, shouldn't we rehabilitate art.¹⁷⁹

With post modernism one sees the kitschification of culture as one its many symptoms. Baudrillard provides us with a useful definition: "The kitsch object is commonly understood as one of that great army of 'trashy' objects, made of plaster of Paris or some such imitation material: that gallery of cheap junk—accessories, folksy knickknacks, 'souvenirs', lampshades or fake African masks—which proliferate everywhere, with a preference for holiday resorts and places of leisure".¹⁸⁰ To the aesthetics of beauty and originality, kitsch opposes its *aesthetics of simulation*: it everywhere reproduces objects smaller or larger than life; it imitates materials (in plaster, plastic, etc.); it apes forms or combines them discordantly; *it repeats fashion without having been part of the experience of fashion*".¹⁸¹ To understand post modern fashion through the lens of kitsch is convenient if one looks into the process of simulation that is rampant in the present age. One can trace the idea of fashion been inspired by pop icons and in that sense turning into kitsch. Denesi mentions a number of pop icons and all of whom have had influenced fashion for instance, in terms of girl power, fashion and body styles for women by Madonna and Lara Croft.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Calinescu (1999: 236)

¹⁷⁹ Kulka (1996: 108)

¹⁸⁰ Baudrillard (1998: 109, 110)

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 111.

¹⁸² Denesi 2007.

The string that ties Art and Fashion

While speaking of fashion, one cannot but draw comparisons with art and pop the question as to whether fashion is an art or not. Fashion has forever been influenced by art, and in the recent times Lillethun illustrates this point with the help of the graphic, psychedelic-inspired prints of Italian designer Emilio Pucci to the op art (optical art) prints created by Ossie Clark in England, clothing designers and manufacturers incorporated Andy Warhol's pop art images of ordinary objects such as the famous Campbell's soup can¹⁸³. The art of Piet Mondrian inspired a famous dress by Yves Saint Laurent. The latter also designed a narrow, no-waist, A-line silhouettes and other geometric shapes, while also experimenting with non traditional materials including wood beads and raffia. Paco Rabanne used plastic discs, leather pieces and metal rings to make his innovative outfits.

The question what is fashion can be seen as synonymous with what is art – this preoccupation of deciding and deciphering art and/ or fashion has been a primary consideration for the guardians of modernity but interesting the present epoch seems to be filling-in this chasm and thereby bringing together and appreciating a myriad of experiences. Fashion is now being moulded keeping in mind the post modernist breakdown of the distinction between high and mass culture resulting in a tendency towards the aestheticisation of everyday life.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Neissen writes that art history has been squarely confronted with the problem of what is art, why whom is it defined and using what criteria¹⁸⁵. With the break down of the evolutionist intellectual framework that projected the idea that only the west could have true art, there has been a reorientation in the understanding of art. This view includes non-western art, women's art, as well as 'craft' and the 'new' art ensuring a more comprehensive the development of new research strategies for understanding the proliferation of new art forms. This means that while on the one hand we see a sort of expansion of art into the orbit of industrial design and advertising, on the other hand "there has been the internal avant-gardiste dynamic within the arts in the form of dada and surrealism in the 1820's and Post Modernism in the 1960's sought to show how everyday objects

¹⁸³ Lillethun 2003.

¹⁸⁴ Featherstone 1991.

¹⁸⁵ Neissen 2003

could be aestheticised.”¹⁸⁶ This entails a new focus upon of everyday objects and their asceticisation and the development of a fashion that draws heavily from such sources. The 1960’s Pop Art especially by Andy Warhol is legendary, while closer to home fashion inspired from Bollywood movie posters is one that needs a mention. The 1960’s Pop Art and Post modernism entail a focus upon everyday objects as art. (Warhol’s Campbell soup cans) The expansion of the art market and increase in working artists and ancillary occupations especially in metropolitan cities, plus the use of art as a vehicle for public relations resulted in a significant change in the artist’s role¹⁸⁷

Even within the industry, if one is to apply the logic of art, defining or straitjacketing fashion becomes a daunting task. Fashion exists at both ends of the spectrum and to put a finger on it, or grasp its essence is becoming more and more difficult as the categories that define sartorial fashion are getting more and more elusive. An interesting analysis by Barthes of two of the biggest names in French fashion – Chanel and Courreges, shows how versatile fashion has become¹⁸⁸. On one end of the spectrum we have Chanel symbolising qualities that at first glance seem antagonistic to the very nature of fashion – that is, the values of classical order: reason, mature, permanence, and the desire to charm and not surprise. Chanel therefore stays at the edge of barbarism embodying classicism and being a complete contrast to Courreges whose designs speak of the exact opposite of classicism, that is, - futurism. Courreges is said to be the absolute innovator, young, tempestuous, galvanic, virulent, mad on sport, keen on rhythm, rash to point of being contradictory as he events an evening dress which is not really a dress but are shorts!

The creations by Chanel challenge the very idea of fashion. Fashion as we conceive of today rests on a violent sensation of time. Every year fashion destroys that which it has just been admiring, it adores that which it is about to destroy; last year’s fashion, now destroyed, could offer to the victorious fashion of the current year an unfriendly word such as the dead leave to the living and which can be read on certain tombstones: *I was yesterday what you are today, you will be tomorrow what I am*

¹⁸⁶ Lillethum (2007: 25)

¹⁸⁷ Zukin (1982 cited in Featherstone 1991:25)

¹⁸⁸ Barthes 2006.

today. The very thing that negates fashion, long life, Chanel makes into a precious quality.¹⁸⁹

What then is fashion today?

Now in the aesthetics of clothing there is a very particular, even paradoxical, value which ties seduction to long life: that is 'chic': 'chic' can handle and even demands if not the worn look, atleast usage; 'chic' cannot stand the look of newness. Chic, this sublimated time is the key value in Chanel. Courreges contrast this by having no fear for the new – their lines are fresh, colourful, even brightly coloured, the dominant colour being white – the absolute new. From Chanel to Courreges the grammar of timescales changes: the unchanging chic of Chanel tells us that the woman has already lived while the obstinate brand newness of Courreges tells us that she is going to live.¹⁹⁰

James Clifford employs the term art culture system to mean, 'the general system of objects within which (aesthetically) valued objects circulate and make sense'; it is the outcome of 'powerful discrimination made at particular moments.'¹⁹¹ By virtue of this system, he argues, a world of aesthetic value is created and a meaningful deployment and circulation of artefacts maintained. Here, there is strong relation between the terms art and culture, needs to be explored. Historically, the operation of this alliance meant that while the term 'culture' in principle includes all learned human behaviour, in practice it privileges, through its connection with 'art', the coherent, balanced and authentic aspects of the life of a community or society above the contradictory, incoherent and disruptive aspects.

During the second half of the twentieth century, however, the validity of the distinction between high and popular culture has been called into doubt, especially, in certain understanding of contemporary culture as postmodern. This is seen to be, in part, a consequence of the re-evaluation of the significance of the activity of consumption itself. This re-evaluation is in turn a consequence of the challenge to the opposition between the notion of 'the original', which has historically been so central

¹⁸⁹ Barthes (2006: 108)

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Clifford (1988: 122 cited in Lury 1996: 55)

to the Western valuation of art, and the notion of 'reproduction' or 'the copy' (historically held to be definitive of mass or popular culture). This challenge is linked to development of technologies of mass communication which have contributed to an ever greater separation between the relation of production of an artwork from those of its consumption.¹⁹²

However it is not clear whether this challenge to the distinction between high and popular culture will merely result in a redrawing of the cultural map or whether it will erase the distinction all together. In this respect, it is important to remember that the art-culture system is itself a contested field, and not all individuals or social groups have historically had the same relationship to either high or popular culture. Moreover, the organisation of the art culture system is affected not only by challenges to the distinction between high and popular culture as a consequence of changes in the mass reproduction of cultural objects, but also by challenges to the distinction between *high* and *folk* or primitive culture. In practice there were terms of approbation reserved for creations of elites in Europe and North America. However, in the twentieth century, the domains of both art and culture have undergone a series of developments. A plural definition of culture – cultures – emerged as a liberal alternative to the previously dominant evolutionary classification of (a singular) human culture.

Fashion Re-considered

In recent years one finds a somewhat noticeable change in the power of the fashion industry to dictate fashions to the masses. Teri Agins writes that increasingly, the roles have reversed.¹⁹³ The power now belongs to the consumers and it is they who decide what to wear, when to buy and how much to pay for them. One of Agins' central ideas, which she returns to again and again, is that there is such a plurality of personal expression in the sartorial realm that women no longer look to either the media or to designers as the arbiter of style, and thus have become their own stylists.. She quotes Martha Nelson (Editor, *In Style* magazine), "the fact is that women are

¹⁹² Lury 1996.

¹⁹³ Agins (1999:7)

interested in clothes, but the average consumer isn't interested in the 'fashion world'". Women today, want attractive clothes that function in the real world, "clothes that fit into your life".¹⁹⁴

She delineates four major trends that have sent fashion rolling in a new direction. With a growing number of women turning professionals and moving in to the workplace, they have become secure enough to ignore the foolishness of the runaway in favour of an authoritative, polished, power look. This has led to certain kind of preference for practical and comfort clothing in place of frills and constraining garments that hinder mobility and professional efficacy. By the 90's in Europe and America and about almost a decade later in India, fashion designers could not set the fashion agenda anymore. Styles were no longer trickling down from the couture, instead, trends were bubbling up from the streets, from urban teenagers, and the forces in pop music, cinema and other counter culture agencies. Examples of this are innumerable. Looking towards Hollywood in the sixties, the names, Beatles, Bob Dylan, Rolling Stones pop to mind as trend setters who influenced fashions of the times considerable.¹⁹⁵ During the 1960's young men copied the hairstyle of the Beatles and the mop style became a rage all over the world. At the same time the impact of the hippie culture was to be felt strongly all over. . The hippie fashion is not to be missed. Hippies embraced denim jeans which symbolized solidarity with the working classes and it has remained till this date a must have garment for almost everybody, especially in the western world. Similarly, each decade has a trend to follow, the eighties with Michale Jackon, Cher, Madonna, Tom Cruise among others. The eighties boast of Tom Cruise, Courtney Love, in the 1990's and finally the new millennium has names like Angelina Jolie, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and so on.

A defining moment in high fashion occurred in 1992 with the closing down of Martha, one of the much admired dress salons at Park Avenue¹⁹⁶. Martha's demise was the latest casualty in a rash of salon deaths, like that of Loretta Blum in Dallas, Amen Wandy Wardy in Beverly Hills, and Sara Fredericks in Boston. As such salons

¹⁹⁴ Agins, 1999.

¹⁹⁵ Danesi 2007.

¹⁹⁶ Starting in 1930s, Martha Phillips, a feisty entrepreneur with impeccable taste, began her reign as America's leading standard-bearers for snob appeal and Paris originals.

closed down, many of their suppliers, namely the couture houses in Paris faced a precarious future.

Yet another reason that may be seen is a breakdown of high fashion in favour of localized personalized styles might be the change in people's values with regard to fashion. the break between ordinary clothes.¹⁹⁷ This divide began to crumble when affordable clothing houses started to design good looking clothes that were available at every price and deflated the notion that fashion belonged exclusively to the elite. Increasingly, it has become a badge of honour to be a bargain hunter even among the well-to-do. It is not uncommon to hear of celebrities and fashionistas to speak proudly of fantastic buys at street markets from New York to New Delhi. the tagline, "it is fashionable to pay less" brings to light this sentiment.¹⁹⁸ Also, the acceptance of the fact that behind the labels of many big brands is some pretty ordinary merchandise has increasingly led the savviest of shoppers want to pay greater attention to details like fabric, workmanship and value.

Marketing analysts describe consumers' new embrace of the most functional and most affordable clothes as the 'commoditization' of fashion. This commoditization of clothes coincided with the most popular clothing trends of the 1990's: the classics, simple chic and minimalism. Agins pegs this change to the fact that such mainstream styles are far easier for designers to execute on a commercial scale as they are cheaper and safer to produce with lesser margin for error.¹⁹⁹

A study conducted by Andrew Hill on the sameness of fashion in contemporary time further adds weight to the idea of fashion having become routinised.²⁰⁰ Hill talks of fashion and individualism and notes how in spite of the claims of modern dress being a signifier of the individuality that is celebrated today, it in reality very far from it. The phrase 'distinguishable by their clothing' is nullified through this analysis, because in spite of the fact that consumption seems to have become very important to people's identities today, the problem arises when one begins to notice *what* it is that people

¹⁹⁷ By ordinary clothes I refer here to clothes that are not fashionable, or that do not change periodically and are purchased from low end localized stores, in opposition to fashionable clothing that are purchased from couturiers, brand clothing or boutiques

¹⁹⁸ Agins 1999.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Breward & Evans (2005)

are consuming by the way of fashion. The meaning and significance of what people are wearing has worn down as the signifying power of clothes has been eroded²⁰¹ and therefore there seems little sense in associating the promise of individuality and identity with the current era.

There are a number of reasons for this lax, with one of the most important being the overbearing power of casual clothing that has flooded the market. The practice of dressing for different occasions and events has by now totally negated with comfort clothing filling in all the gaps. In addition to this, Agins point out that since the 90's there has also been an emergence of the Internet set look, that was head started with bill Gates, founder Microsoft Corp. dressed for success in chinos and sports shirts.²⁰² In America's more traditional corporations, the men's fashion revolt first erupted in Pittsburgh in 1991. Before long, the rest of America, and today much of the globe has shifted gears and has accepted khakis and knit shirts as casual office wear in place of the collared shirt and the necktie. The concept of 'Casual Friday or Dress down Friday' is no longer met with raised eyebrows.

Lipovetsky further explains that through the increased predominance of casual wear, clothing has become little more than being practical, comfortable and relaxed. Although this argument might seem problematic this trend is also observable at the level of high fashion. While the flamboyance of couture shows make it awkward to speak of fashion as a primarily an art form with little bearing on practicality but a peek into the actual sales of most designers tell a different tale. It is interesting to note how even though the leading crowd pleasing fashion designers do up their runways with outlandish, impractical clothing, they are nonetheless rooted in reality as the bulk of the actual merchandise that is meant for store sale are always palatable enough for millions of customers around the world.²⁰³ In turn, the very rise of casual wear can be seen in part, as deriving from the attitude that it does not really matter if people want to dress in a casual way, as what people wear does not hold much significance anyhow. This process of casualisation in clothes can also be seen reflected in the changing social relations across the world as these events change the clearly

²⁰¹ Breward & Evans, 2005.

²⁰² Agins 1999.

²⁰³ Ibid.

structured and tightly organised patterns of meaning associated with the older models that put forward that meanings that were fundamental to the ordering of societies have diminished. Durkheim identified this version of loss of meaning as anomie, afflicting modern societies and it is this process that we can identify at work in what people wear nowadays. Without norms, without hierarchies, without some central point of reference, there can be little in the way of a system of values or meaning at work in what people wear.

Concluding Remarks

In the current age one notices a trajectory towards the creation of kitsch and generic mass products, and thereby moving away further from the principal of exclusivity that once characterised the fashion phenomenon. An interesting perspective of contemporary society is the fact that people are increasingly able to monitor and evaluate the cultural contexts of different fashions and place themselves within those cultures accordingly.²⁰⁴ Because of the component of sign value or aesthetic image in material objects, design is becoming a more important aspect in the production of goods.²⁰⁵ This is what can be termed aesthetic reflexivity, and its attribute lies in its contribution to people's ability to judge and distinguish images and symbols operating at the level of feeling.²⁰⁶

The driving forces of contemporary aestheticisation processes are at once cultural and technological – cultural through their content, technological because this cultural content flows increasingly via new information and communication infrastructures. The capacity of the new information and communication infrastructure is creating a new type of economy. It is dominated and characterised by flows – flows of information, of images, of money, of goods and of people, that are increasingly connected and that circulate ever faster through networks that are becoming the dominant social morphology of society. In a broader historical perspective, the network society represents a qualitative change in the human experience.

²⁰⁴ Verwijnen talks about the nature of images in contemporary society and how people are able to choose their identities accordingly.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 4.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

The French often say that it is necessary to speak seriously of matters seemingly frivolous, and what better field to apply this motto than sartorial fashion?

Indeed, there is nothing more frivolous than fashion, and yet, at the same time, there is little that, in spite of all its outward irrationality has managed to capture the imaginations of generations over the world. From its very inception, fashion has, on the one hand, been misunderstood and on the other hand, been valourised as a phenomenon that is desired, even if unwillingly, by almost all through the ages. Indeed fashion reveals not only the appearance of our society, but also its essence. Seemingly frivolous, fashion embodies the two main angst of our time: the loss of social link on one hand, and the overflow of material goods in the other hand.

What is most interesting while studying sartorial fashion is the manner in which it has managed to survive through the epochs, spreading slowly but steadily to all parts of the world, rising from the ashes like a phoenix, over and over again to assert its presence. The paradox of fashion lies its transience and sustainability, and it is these contradictory qualities in which lie its beauty.

With the changes that characterise post modern age, one is able to locate the manner in which sartorial fashion has evolved, accommodating the chameleon in us. The hierarchical structure of fashion that produces the authoritative status of designers sounds inflexible, but in fact it is democratic and fluid. Fashion as an institution produces hierarchy among all makers of clothes by adding social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital to clothes, which are then transformed to luxury, elite, or identity specific clothing.

In modern and post modern societies, consumption and production are complementary and, therefore, production does not take place within a completely separate sphere in relation to a broader social context of consumption. With the breakdown of boundaries, the divide between production and consumption also needs to be brought together. The fashion system that we see today is a combination of the processes of production, distribution and consumption.

The strict divisions between fashion and anti-fashion, high fashion and mass fashion, men and women, rich and poor, among many are breaking down. Fashion now has become a part of cultural globalisation and is therefore about the dissolution of the old structures and boundaries. In fashion too, it is about the increasing transnationalisation of designers coming from all over the world to the centres of high fashion, as well as developing indigenous fashion systems that in turn influence global fashion. This breakdown of boundaries has been often explained as a consequence of postmodernism, and has resulted in the breakdown of the categories resulting in kitsch fashion. The term kitsch is interesting to use in the modern context as it juxtaposes the earlier understanding of fashion a phenomenon that stands separately from the masses. With the boom in the casualisation of fashion, there has emerged an uncanny similarity in the clothes that are being produced in the Western world. Interestingly, in India, high fashion, still has not come out of the clutches of the rich middle ages, where in casual or simplistic clothing are seen to reign at the top. With an emphasis on heavy thread work and the like, it is still to reach that crest of post modern fashion that is characterised with the sameness of casual wear.

Is it then true that fashion is going to cease to exist in the near future, if exclusivity, identity are the bearers of fashion? This study points in the direction of the negative, as sartorial fashion with all its paraphernalia is a phenomenon that thrives in change, and indeed in a society that is dynamic in every sense.

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