

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF FASHION
AS A PHENOMENON
OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Let us consider the example of Galileo and of the fundamental induction which, taken all in all, has created modern physics. How does he proceed? It is not facts that supply him with the concept of falling bodies on which he bases his arguments. He forms it actively, he constructs it, he imagines the ideal case of the free fall of an object, which is something never found in experience; and having constructed this idea, he tests it and demonstrates that empirical facts, jumbled and confused as they are, although they never present the case of free fall in ideal circumstances, can nevertheless be understood on the basis of this ideal concept (by introducing additional conditions, such as buoyancy, resistance, etc., which account for the disparity between fact and theoretical concept).

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *Les Sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, Paris, Les Cours de Sorbonne, 1967.

Translated by M. D. F.

The phenomena of fashion are inextricably mixed with an infinite variety of behaviours that challenges simple enumeration. A theory offers itself nonetheless in the form of an explicit description of the structures that support its evolution. Meeting the phenomena of fashion in their most disconcerting characters—their omnipresence, the paradox of an imitative behaviour that serves the prestige of the individual, their changes¹—we set ourselves to isolate the principles on which it works. Thus, in the course of investigation, we have been put in possession of an explanatory model of which it will be sufficient for us to verify if it regulates the other aspects under which fashion can appear. A model that is simple enough, because we propose to show that one has said everything that the manifestations of fashion can be when one has recognised there a *manifestation of sociability, of imitative origin and playful character*.

1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF FASHION

The first characteristic of fashion, the most universal, the most constant, is its omnipresence. There is no behaviour, no form, no time in social life that is not affected by it. Fashion is not limited to clothes, it extends to conversation, leisure, games, art, sciences, education; there is no man, no action, no soliloquy even, that is not affected. But this omnipresence finds interpretation in the nature of the manifestation of sociability that fashion is, in its essential aim.

Let us consider what motives the individual has to be sociable. From the earliest age the infant seeks to integrate itself with its surroundings; it knows by instinct that this is its chance to survive. Before all exterior pressure the instinct for preservation turns the child towards sociable behaviour. Finally, in a primary process where the subconscious physical life takes root, the mother-child relationship as psychoanalysis has made us understand, has founded communication with the other on desire, that is to say on the most primitive subjective experience. "The

¹ Stoetzel, "Les Phénomènes collectifs de la mode," *La psychologie sociale*, Paris, Flammarion, 1963. pp. 245-249.

The Manifestations of Fashion

phenomena of reciprocal communication between mother and child become the life-giving matrix of the *first role the infant assumes* in complete independence," stresses J. L. Moreno himself.² Thus there are definite manifestations of sociability that precede the founding of the positive state of society. These expressions of sociability contain in a powerful form the distinctive modes of collective exchange; it is an upheaval, to a level virtually biological, of possible social relations, this upheaval—for want of a structured social biology—remaining unpredictable.

At the moment where it declares itself the game of fashion does not differ from social mimicry where we are engaged in the fact of our corporeal existence; by nature un-structural these games are at first the expression of spontaneous adherence of the individual to collective life. From there springs the ingenuity with which fashions are followed, the irrational character of their implications in daily life.

Certainly, individual integration with collectivity is the effect of an imposition, the subject has to submit to the law that organises the community. But this subjugation only concerns the integration of instinctive energies, the rationalised organisation of society; as soon as one deals with manifestations of sociability, it is not the reality-principle that governs their appearance, but (before the repression inherent in the state of society) the pleasure-principle, the instinctive urge of acceptance.

But if these first gestures that express the desire to associate, place themselves under the regime of the principle of pleasure, then these social mimicries arise from the narcissism of earliest infancy; by absorbing them, the individual is endlessly choosing himself; he adapts himself to communal life by following—unconsciously—his egotistic impulses. The games of fashion are a field where the original puerile forms of love of oneself, the primary narcissistic tendencies are effectively inherent.

Thus, by reason of their narcissistic character the games of fashion fascinate adolescents and women.

The adolescent, whose desire is not yet fixed on the other, finds there a support that allows him to objectivise symbolically

² J.-L. Moreno, *Psychothérapie de groupe et psychodrame*, Paris, P.U.F., 1965, p. 108.

the still ambiguous content of his impulses. Young women find in the games of fashion, with their fantasies, their caprices, their childishnesses, a prop for their self-esteem wherever feminine reserve inclines them, even if this is only the passive role of amorous seduction. That is why it is generally in the upper classes where leisure is left to the woman to give herself over to elegance, where the *mundus muliebris* has such a distinctly auto-erotic atmosphere, that one finds a reign of frigidity consequent on narcissistic regression, with all the childishness and incapacity to love that accompanies it.³

Dandyism, in its egotistical complaisance, in its feminine obsession in regard to others, assumes the hidden narcissism of the adult male. Brummel, Baudelaire, Wilde, we are aware of the nuances of this game where the individual himself gives to others the spectacle of his social mimicry.⁴

We mention, meanwhile, that the homosexual perversions of behaviour attached to corporeal aspects of the participation in collective life are not games: manifestations of fashion are only the setting for a symbolical transfer.

But this transfer of primary narcissism is expressed in a mimed game: all fashion is contained in a gesture; moreover, it must be stressed that the gesture, carries communication. Its manifestations are then so many signs of mimicry that declare, in their aim, social belonging, it being understood that it is sufficient that the gesture can be found under the expression, forming the semantics of it.

So, in language, the element subject to fashion is not the meaning of discourse, but its mimetic support, that is to say its rhythm, its tone, its articulation; in the choice of words and expressions, also subject to fashion, it is not thought but mimicry that inspires us.⁵ This is equally true of intellectual fashions. Existentialism or structuralism: it is the vocabulary that is borrowed and not the research: to think afresh is not given to us every day.

³ S. Freud, *Pour introduire le narcissisme*.

⁴ Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Du Dandysme et de Georges Brummel*; J.-P. Sartre, *Baudelaire*, Paris, N.R.F., coll. Idées; R. Merle, *Oscar Wilde*, Paris, N.R.F..

⁵ E. Radar, "The Study of Mime as a Manifestation of Sociability, as a Play and Artistic Expression," in *Diogenes*, No. 50, Summer 1965.

The Manifestations of Fashion

And more, the literature in fashion conveys nothing, it hardly exists as a language, but it is used to establish a complete similitude between the object praised and that which is fashion.⁶ In other words, the literature of fashion establishes itself in a relationship of bondage to the mimicry of current fashion; it relates to the social mime, finally it does not distinguish itself from a *flatus vocis*, with a sound linguistically insignificant. One dreams of the conversations that animate the “varnishing” of an exhibition of paintings; a film producer might class them under the rubric “sound effects”. So, fashion finds itself to be a non-verbal communicational material, even when words are used.

However, mime is the first language. It is in mime that the baby makes his apprenticeship of language, as is shown by the phenomenon of echolalia, or repetition of the last stressed syllable of a word, in small children. Active pedagogical methods, group psychology, the development of psychodrama and even the findings of the generative grammar, are these not so many approaches which aim to retrieve native dynamism, hidden under mime?⁷ Even adults make constant use of it. Mutual sympathy, new born love, confesses itself in a mimetic exchange; freedom of gesture, most games are the occasion for this—indication of its regenerative virtue—suffices to ensure relaxation. Lastly mime establishes social communication, it gives birth to the pity that awakens at the beginning of physical attraction, the basis of the state of society, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu and modern anthropology.

Meanwhile the manifestations of fashion cover the field of corporeal experience, the expressions that underline it, such as clothes, the group actions that codify it such as customs and ceremonies; they are then by their origin so many gestures where social communication begins. So, before any “Social Contract”, they are experience and an expression of meeting,

⁶ R. Barthes, *Système de la Mode*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 1966.

⁷ Apprenticeship in a mime does not indicate apprenticeship by imitation; the gesture must be put *en rapport* with the bio-psychic imperatives of the subject; that is to say with a basic pulse indefinitely active. There is then an original dynamism in all mime, although there is also an element of imitation. Cfr. G. Durand, *Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, 1963.

declaration of unsophisticated sociability, the most direct means of recognition of the social roles.⁸ To make himself accepted and to give confidence at the moment when he introduces himself, the commercial representative resorts to a first message that will be immediately received and understood the correctness of his dress. Such a message is exclusively imitative. But is it not also the resort of the preacher, the magistrate, the politician of the screen, the seducer? All, in this respect, are actors. This, then, is at the level of reciprocal greeting, of fascination, of visible marks of the clan or the class where these expressions of fashion operate.

2. THE CONCERN WITH HIGHER ADAPTATION IN SOCIAL LIFE

But the manifestations of fashion are still, as we have seen, of a narcissistic character; they are not limited to translating the aim of social adaptation; they confess it complacently. The individual who follows fashion sees himself there; he gives his imitation of social adaptation as a spectacle for others; he pleases himself with this parade.

This explains the paradox of fashion, that is to say the contradiction between evident conformism and the wish to assert oneself, to distinguish oneself as a member of a group.⁹ But that which the individual displays in imitating others is the superiority of his social adaptation; this exposure is a boast by which he flatters himself, and by which he hopes to fascinate.

He flatters himself because he sees himself supported in his imitative behaviour by the social group. That is, for him, a source of security. Uneasy, Narcissus is reassured by the echo; the individual, unhappy and mortal, in identifying himself with the behaviour of an apparently all-powerful society, amuses himself, and can believe himself saved.

Moreover, he is fascinating, for happy adaptation is an end aspired to by all; we are not very far from envying this irreproachable behaviour.

Nathalie Sarraute, in *Les Fruits d'or* has described well the

⁸ Buytendyck, *Phénoménologie de la rencontre*, Bruges, Desclée de Brouwer.

⁹ J. C. Fluegel, *Psychology of Clothes*, London, Hogarth, 1939.

The Manifestations of Fashion

invulnerability of judgments confirmed by fashion, in regard to the unalterable inferiority of the individual who is not "in the swim." By means of a subtle use of nuances of spoken language, of tricks, accents, tones, the novelist shows us the intellectual security, the calm patronage of the one whose ideas are in fashion, and, by contrast, the non-existence of misguided ideas, that are not followed up.

What the individual affirms in his social imitation is, we said, the quality of his adaptation. Thus, consciously or not, it is always a superior adaptation that is imitated.

In backward centres touched by industrial civilisation, the appearance of the civilised is absolutely correct; for this they sacrifice, if they must, the best of their resources; for it provides them with a social frame of reference equivalent to the symbols of the repudiated tribe. The same law operated in the pre-Revolutionary Regime: at Versailles the courtier imitated the king, in the provinces the gentleman imitated the courtier, in the town the bourgeois copied the gentleman, in the country the upstart peasant mimicked the bourgeois, etc. . . . In the 18th century snobbery appeared in England as a development tied to the advent of the industrial society; it consisted, for the commercial classes, whose power was based on money, in making themselves feel easy by imitating aristocratic values. So the upper middle class pretended, outwardly, to lay claim to the same values as the nobility of the pre-Revolutionary Regime; they surrounded themselves with the same decor; from there came the horrible copies of old styles, thus appeared the narrowest observance of academic traditions. Money permitted all the deceptions and upheld them, such is the essence of snobbery.

But, today, what is the behaviour of higher adaptation that is copied by the whims of fashion? The behaviour of superior adaptation imitated today is that of the *homo oeconomicus*. An American economist¹⁰ has given a description that we turn to more willingly in that the portrait has been conceived with complete frankness, with the idea of defining the human type most apt to serve the ends of the output of the industrial society. Comparing this portrait with the traits that mark the

¹⁰ W. W. Rostow, *The Process of Economic Development*.

contemporary manifestations of fashion we catch the closest connection between the characteristics of this behaviour and the models suggested by current fashion. Here, diagramatized, is the portrait. The individual who best serves the development of advanced industrial society: (1) is constantly preoccupied with the exigencies of rational calculation; (2) resorts, in his activities, to the most efficient technical procedures, that is to say, to the latest productions; (3) advances continuously and so finds himself always ready to innovate.

The efficacy of the rational calculation is the implicit reference in the variable revelations of contemporary fashion. So, at the level of the *parlerie*, rationality and profit become mixed; a calculation is well made if it is profitable, and in common economics profit is established as the *ultima ratio*. Lastly its efficacy endows money with a quality of rationality which does more than justify it, which *idealizes* it: money is a *value*. The representation that the public in an advanced industrial society makes of success is tied to this naïve equality: the rhetoric of the politician, of the publicist, of the technocrat demonstrates it well enough, reducing it most often to claims touching the standard of living. To display one's fortune is not shameful, but a sign of highly adjusted behaviour. "Conspicuous consumption" demonstrates a success carried by the enthusiasm of a whole society. The debate that can arise causes an unequivocal conservative reaction when it does so. A constant of contemporary fashions will then be a tendency to expenditure, which seems to be contradicted by a characteristic brash novelty in the articles for sale: nickelplating, sparkling plastics, showy gewgaws.

The high prices, experienced in the art market, indicate the exercise of the ascendancy of money. By its origin the work of art escapes the calculated valuation: an economic computation will never determine its creation, nor, after the event, will it change the quality. The high prices only sanction, in a signed work, a *de facto* monopoly, of which the control escapes the rules of the market. Meanwhile a price is agreed because the market must establish itself come what may! But, whereas a calculated price is accorded to a work of art, this finds itself associated with all other commercial values; the basic anti-economic nature of a work of art, its radical strangeness by compa-

The Manifestations of Fashion

ri-son with an order founded on profit, the original sin that established it there, become travestied. And this is the first debasement of which artistic creation is a victim in a society of consumers. Of which the artist is also the victim, because these same prices give him a statute that masks the problematic essence of his enterprise: it is a certain figure, and not his work, that established his reputation. The public is informed by the publicity report, put out by the dealers about the prices agreed to. From that moment the principle of interest for the work of art is not in pleasure or in passion, curiosity or vital need as it should be, it is in the reverent emotion that the high price has aroused. The misunderstanding is then complete. That the mark conveyed by fashion and borne by an artist is a value set in figures, shows to what point money has become the standard of reference: the "conspicuous consumption" rules the manifestations of fashion even to cultural forms; for it is an advanced industrial society one of the principal expressions of the good adaptation of the economic subject; also, money is the rational expression of exchanges in a producing society.

Technology—second universal reference—proliferates in spare-time activities where it has no place: automatic billiards, travel that is the record of kilometres, portable cameras, transistors, portable television sets... in the hours of idleness the conversation lingers on the details of technical innovation; mechanical manipulation takes a magic place, the individual is spellbound by it even in his hours of liberty.

The success of a bastard form of "design" under the name of "styling" explains itself by the effect of this same fascination. The "styling" is employed to simulate the shape of industrial objects fashioned according to the standard received of a pseudo "design"; the objects, sold under the guise of innovation, were almost completely made from assembly lines already existing. This deception remains so widespread that craftsmen and the theorists of a genuine "design" have come to postulate a restructuring of the consumer society.¹¹ Meanwhile the innovation

¹¹ H. Van Lier, "Culture et Industrie: le design," in *Critique*, November, 1967, No. 246.

announced with the help of publicity makes object fashionable in their capacity as innovations. From this one can measure the power that reference to technical innovation has over public opinion: it works so well that one simply has to simulate it.

Must one remember the great number of publicity slogans that refer to the functional norm, to the rationality of use, the exclusive attention to efficiency? They are used for cars, clothes, apartments, country houses, etc... Paradoxically, the rationality, the efficiency that certifies it, acts on opinion with the force of a myth, that is to say the image is accepted without checking.

The character of youthfulness—that is the third reference—is mobilised in connection with everything and to the profit of everything. God knows, the face of publicity is unlined and alert! The television studios and the cinema feed on a constant change of girls and young men hardly out of adolescence; clothes are designed for young silhouettes. But it is over all the promptitude of youth to change that is flattered, its biological plasticity, the spirit with which it gives itself to novelty, the impatience to rid itself of ancient structures, its extrovert behaviour. The reason for this reference to youthfulness lies in the necessity for the industrial system to deal with human material, it is the rising generations that are mobilised; the cinema, television, publicity, commercial representation, the consumption of new products have special need of them; the natural graces are vulgarised, biological reserves are forfeited, in mobilising nervous resources. The techniques of social communication “enslave”—in the technological sense of the term—the new waves of population; this is why youth is in fashion.

The triple reference to function, technicality, the characteristics of youthfulness, establishes, at the level of heedless behaviour, adaptive behaviour to the industrial society; at the level of the naïve manifestations of sociability, it possesses reflexes of unconditional integration; lastly this triple reference marks the expressions of fashion, because these three characteristics correspond to the special type of individual, agent of the industrial society, carried and confirmed by it.

But why is this type of mannerism endowed with such prestigious qualities? Why is it this that is imitated? Because

The Manifestations of Fashion

to be adapted to society, in giving at least the visible signs, is to be accepted by it, to triumph with it, to be, like it, infallible, and because the individual in his isolation, his insecurity, his boredom, has need of a group that amuses him, in the sense that Pascal has given to this word. From there comes the fact that ascendancy of fashion grows with isolation, with the anxiety and the psychological vulnerability of individuals. Just as the first result of uncontrolled urbanization¹² is to increase the state of detachment, to make it constant, so this involves a general subjection to the incentives of fashion; the adhesion to the higher type of adaptation palliates the absence of participation that characterizes the condition of man in megalopolis.

Production, based on a free market, sensitized to demand by a study of the market, always informed of the conditioning of the clientele, derives benefit from the neurotic activities of the purchaser and does not stop furnishing new objects for the consumer. Thus is born the new phenomenon of "conspicuous consumption". This consumption compensates for the depersonalization resulting from a condition defined by a bureaucratic function, where individuality, emptied of all proper content, reduced to a formal existence, seeks to assert itself in setting up a high standard of living.

Thus is achieved the enterprise of manipulation of populations in industrial societies of a market called "free". Today fashion is the channel of a "hidden persuasion" that defines the very prototype of alienation in an advanced industrial society, an alienation so complete that the individual himself agrees to the condition of object, of an individual deprived of his freedom of judgment and of choice.¹³

As for the anarchist fashions that proclaim behaviour in opposition to those that display success, they reduce the maladjusted to the roles of clowns; do not the best plays contain interludes? From there comes the astonishing plasticity of the north-American society and its faculty of integration of the most aberrant movements: these become the themes of new pleasures; the techniques of vulgarization of publicity,

¹² P. Ledrut, *Sociologie urbaine*, Paris, P.U.F., 1968.

¹³ H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Mass., Beacon Press, 1966.

reducing every act of understanding to an act of consumption, are sufficient to assure the operation. In truth, the solitary ones who do break away, cease to be the fashion, but they must desire this and remain lucid: the revolutionaries, the artists without privileges, the free men are few. And what wolves in sheep's clothing! "Those who do not enter into the spirit of their times have all the trouble", said Voltaire, who had reasoned from his own standpoint of superficiality.

The fascination of the model of higher adaptation is practised by every means and at all times, and without doubt, the rising generations are first reached by the images of domination carried by fashion; their anxiety for the future makes them attentive; their lack of attachment, credulous; their psychological plasticity, docile. We add that fashions share in the daily atmosphere,¹⁴ they are brought into the home by the television screen, by magazines, by eating habits. As the incitements of fashion are also occasions for narcissistic projections, immediate prop of communication, spontaneous forms of social relations, they also mobilise the instinctive life underlying the consciousness. The cave myth concerns us, the images are taken for the reality itself, nobody escapes any more from idolatry and almost all consent.

An obscure feeling of guilt results from the satisfaction of the selfish instincts and a regression results from the behaviour where the individual indulges his self-complacency. Without doubt this investment, however perverse it may seem is endorsed by social participation; the *consensus socialis* is a facility, a justification and an idealisation. Lastly a spontaneous transfer of immature impulses and their socialisation—since games of fashion are the objects of performance—certainly ensure a therapeutic function.¹⁵ Nevertheless the support of the behaviour is artificial, of a hallucinatory quality, even hypnotic.

It is necessary then that fascinating objects be replaced before the illusion disappears; if they were to remain, an objective

¹⁴ H. Lefebvre, *Le Langage et la société*, Paris, N.R.F., Coll. Idées, 1966.

¹⁵ "Transference establishes itself spontaneously in all human relations as well as in the relationship between doctor and patient; it conveys throughout the therapeutic influence and it operates with more force in that one scarcely suspects its existence." S. Freud, *Cinq Leçons sur la Psychanalyse*, Paris, Payot, 1966.

The Manifestations of Fashion

understanding, in which the subject will be undeceived, would take the place of the slightly hallucinatory perception of new-born desire; a rhythm accelerated in the succession of fashions, as it sees itself today, translates then a hallucination more intense, an alienation more complete.

3. THE METAMORPHOSES OF FASHION

The constant changes to which fashions are prey do not take away only the knowledge of their illusory nature, the masks change also because the change corresponds to an inherent need in the nature of sensibility, the need for change is an instinct that cannot be distinguished, in the bio-psychic structures, from those of the game.

In offering himself the spectacle of his own exuberance, as an object of surprise, the player in astonishment experiences his own being. The consciousness that he has that is not productive, that would be work; it doesn't transform itself symbolically into sensitive forms, that would be a work of art; it doesn't deepen on reflection, that would be philosophy, it plays with the vital overflow as of a liberty suggested indefinitely. Such is the experience of the game. The player keeps himself at the level of profusion of possessions, he doesn't change them with any useful aim in view but, by means of an imaginary convention, he puts himself in the position to incite them. Here then the game is started and surprise after surprise comes; where will the ball fall again? What cards will be thrown down? And what dice? More even than Narcissus, it is the infant Eros shaken with the tremors of an ingenuous life. Thus there is not only sadness and failure to make of us conscious beings, we are also beguiled by the indefinite possibilities of perceptible life. The object of the game then is to induce life, which lies in each and around us, to become a performance given to consciousness, to fling the player into encounters, chances, surprises, where he will experience ephemeral gifts of this same life. One can imagine that the overexcitement that accompanies the game holds rests in the delicious proximity of self to self where play behaviour summons the consciousness.

The inexhaustible ability to invent forms, to scatter them,

to change them, to abolish and resuscitate them, that is observable in the manifestations of fashion, proclaims their sporting character. Fashion is still governed by the bio-psychic structures of the game. The exuberance that it gives to surprise, where our social mime is concerned, provides its share of immediate appearance of intuitive relations, sensitive ties, of physical irruption. Fashion, in effect, plays with appearances, offers itself as a spectacle, seeks to surprise; its aim is neither consideration nor usefulness, it is sensitive, ingenuously aesthetic. Its complicity with Eros is evident. Lastly its prop is the variety, the expansion, the effervescence of social life, and thus it is also its luxuriance that the fashion games, in their metamorphoses, express.

Thus the principle of the interpretation of the changes of fashion is contained in the effervescence of social life: life is prey to an uninterrupted metabolism; perceptible activity is uninterrupted creation, the succession of the generations condemns society to a biological destiny, fashion allows the consideration on the surface of the ebb and flow with which a demoniac Eros animates social life.

But the sporting character of fashion doesn't stop at games where the vital exuberance of the group causes surprise. Indeed, since Huizinga drew attention to the game as an agent of civilization¹⁶ it is continuously being discovered to possess new functions, functions of education, of apprenticeship, of compensation, of association of the community, of liberation of the faculties of creation. The game of the very small child is the opportunity to coordinate the sensory-motor apparatus, to recapitulate in himself so as to control the animal and primitive life; later the game is an apprenticeship to adult life; in more hazardous amusements the young boy practises audacity, he gets a taste for the struggle, he learns tenacity, he accepts through the conventions of the game the obligations of communal life; for the adolescent, dancing, entertainment, song, rags show in their turn, without scandal or guilt, the prohibitions of social life, he finds in these manifestations an outlet

¹⁶ Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, trans. by Seresia, Paris, N.R.F., 1951; E. Finck, *Le jeu comme symbole du monde*, trans. by Hildebrand and Lindenberg, Paris, éd. de Minuit, 1966.

The Manifestations of Fashion

from the oppression of the established order; for adults, outdoor sports, swimming, mountain climbing, riding, etc., are the occasion to brave the natural elements; the participant finds there a continuance of natural rhythms, an unsophisticated rapport with his own body, in opposition to the mass-production rhythms of technicality. So, the game is a recreation; finally, the conventions that regulate the game are unreal; they are modelled on the time and place where the creative imagination unfolds, and where freedom manifests itself; hence the hypothesis of a *homo ludens* as a forefather of *homo faber*, because the first tools were discovered in playing.¹⁷

But fashion takes upon itself, at the collective level, the functions of the game. The variety of its expressions covers them all. Certain sports become fashionable because they ensure the recreation necessary in a working society, and this function explains the popularity. Often the function of fashion is to circumvent the prohibitions of the established order; the excesses, the aggressiveness, the violence of certain fashions are the occasion of transgressions played where profound frustrations can be projected and at the same time exorcised; it suffices for that that the spectacular element of a manifestation should be more important than its operative efficiency.

So the excesses of fashion are the opportunity for the control of instinctive energies crushed by the state of civilization; fashions furnish society with an outlet for the aggressiveness which, without that, would strengthen the destructive tendencies of extremist politics.

Fashion is also naïve creation. Social mime, animated continuously by the restlessness of the rising generations, like a demonism; expression, in successive waves, of behaviour that seems to open the way to happiness, to success, to strength, immediate translation in spectacular terms of contemporary conditions, the game of fashion incites the artist devoted to surprising the forms of social life at the moment of their appearance. It is this that beguiled, under different headings, Balzac, Baudelaire, Proust: they perceived under the changing nature of fashion the very face of century. Thus these writers induce us,

¹⁷ Benvéniste, "Le Jeu comme structure," *Deucalion*, No. 2, Paris, 1945.

in works marked with the seal of modernity, to consider the mystery of social life, always strange, indefatigably inventive.

The expressions of fashion exercise this taste for form that distinguishes the artist. The spontaneous theatricalisation, skin deep, of gesture, of sentiment, of idea, which is delineated there, belongs also to the world of the creator, it is an outline of the same thing. The creator feels dimly the need to give things form; dandyism, apparently sterile, if one opposes it to laborious periods of production, is sometimes the pretext for creation. These games are presented as places for experiment. It is a period of transition in which to teach oneself the reflexes that will serve later. A correction lifted by elegance and carried to the most extreme details exercises the selective faculties. For those for whom research and judgment constitute the principles of all evolution, of all real progress, what is more useful than that? Intelligence also finds its place, a juggler with the appearances, it becomes more pointed, more insistent, freer.

Leaving the Flèche college the young Descartes, disgusted with a science that did not satisfy him, made his social début, took pleasure in company, in games, delighted in fencing to the point of writing a little treatise on it, after which he travelled and employed nine years in varying observations before he dreamed of writing the incomparable *Discourse on Method*.

Finally, fashion is the expression of the social aims of a person, it explains plastically—since it is a mime and a spectacle—how to be involved in the collective existence, and losing one's way there, how one resorts to fashion. How can one be a Persian? How can one be one fashion more than another? How can one forget at one stage what one is going to become? Must one count on this planet two and a half thousand million marionettes? We do not only have the *commedia dell'arte* to persuade us, but also the comedy theatre, that of Molière, of Pirandello, of Beckett that raises the same question in the spectator, but the performance, which is a work of art, here holds up a liberation, a chance of consciousness, awakening.

It is a fact, today, that the world of leisure and of fashion is subject to the law of unidimensionality of the consumer society. By the studies of market and motivations, themselves made more efficient through the means of electronic computers, the mani-

The Manifestations of Fashion

festations of fashion are made the object of a systematic exploitation. From then onwards, the liberating role of the game in which fashion also takes part, the chance of free expression that it offers, are effaced to the extent that fashions are the symbolical transposition, at the level of gesture, of man's bondage. The world of the game where we have seen fashion take shape at the beginning is now obliterated: disguised imperatives of return, still exercise an absolute power.¹⁸ It is no longer a fashion that must be recognised, it is no longer an expression of sociability that one would read in a monotonous expression, boring and brutal, of the homogenisation of brains, it is the brand of the inhumanity of the advanced industrial society. In the students' revolts, the violences, the crimes of all kinds, we would not recognise fashions, but a symptom, an uneasiness, the sign of an oppression. However, a particular game does continue, but from amusement it has become obsession, and by way of active participation it becomes, in a passive role, brutal satiation:¹⁹ from assent to the social condition it now becomes slavery. Without doubt from a game so falsified one must wake up, and this can only happen by radical criticism of the society in which it occurs.

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Let us conclude. The omnipresence of fashion, the paradox of conventional behaviour, which is also a search for personal prestige, the virtues of change, find their explanation in what it is structurally—a *manifestation of sociability of imitative and sporting nature*.

However, the elements subsumed by the definition, of sociability, of imitation, of sport, act as independent functions within a changeable structure according to the states of civilization.

In primitive environments the manifestations of fashion become confused almost entirely with the characteristics of the manifestations of sociability and the underlying mimetic expression. One sees fashion bordering on habit, on folklore, containing

¹⁸ H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, Mass., Beacon Press, 1955.

¹⁹ R. Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, Paris, N.R.F., 1958.

symbolic expressions of community values, because the active principle of these societies is participation.²⁰

In aristocratic societies the mime of higher adaptation in society dominates the expressions of fashion and gives it style. Etiquette, ceremonial, affectation of manners, elegance of gesture take pride of place. For perfect courtesy indicates a man who belongs to the élite and that the political motivation of societies of the Pre-Revolutionary Regime is governed by a rigidly hierarchical organisation.²¹

In industrial and mass society, it is the sporting character of fashion, its talent for change, its disguised role of social apprenticeship, its functions as compensation for repressed instincts, by way of symbolic transposition, that will carry the day. The active principle of such society is continuous creation. This is only true as the title of a vocation because in the neocapitalist society the active principle is waste.

²⁰ Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive*, Paris, Alcan, 1925.

²¹ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Book IV, ch. II.