
Fashion

For many critics and theorists of modernity, in the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century, fashion *was* the modern. Those who, like Charles Baudelaire, Georg Simmel, and Walter Benjamin, sought to understand the unique character of modern life frequently turned to fashionable dress as a material embodiment of the spirit of modernity. But what was it that these critics saw as so uniquely useful about fashion as shorthand for the spirit of the age? Why did they so often turn to this medium to illuminate the lived and ideological dimensions of life in a rapidly changing, industrial, and consumer capitalist society? Some keys are found in the very elements of the preceding sentence: fashion itself changed rapidly, and so its tempo was understood to reflect the accelerated pace of modern life. As well, in straddling the poles of industrial and consumer capitalism, it had a long reach – and it called attention to the importance of *both* aesthetics and commerce as mediating factors in modernity rather than privileging one or the other. The latter point encapsulates perhaps the most important characteristic of fashion in this period: fashion made visually and materially apparent the instability of many of the ideological boundaries that were central to modern culture. Mythical modernity was structured by a series of dualisms: “man” and nature, subject and other, art and industry, east and west, black and white, masculinity and femininity, among many others. Yet this chapter aims to show that the structure and abundance of fashion called into question binary oppositions that had a strong hold in modernity’s picture of itself. In this sense, fashion dramatized the underside of modern life, the alternative narratives that structured everyday, lived experiences of modernity, highlighting the gap between ideals and representations.

As potentially both an aesthetic object and a mass-produced one, fashion uncomfortably straddled the divides among art, industry, and commerce. Whereas most clothing had been handmade at the beginning of the nineteenth century, rapid technological change – including the advent of sewing and other machines, such as cloth spreading and cutting machines and buttonhole makers – was followed by a refinement of the division of labor and the ultimate deskilling of the needleworker, who became a “garment worker.” Developments like these, which followed the general pattern of standardization in industrial production, led to the capacity to produce clothing more efficiently and inexpensively and to the widespread diffusion of new styles by the early twentieth century – which has been called, controversially, the “democratization” of fashion. On the other hand, the nineteenth century saw the rise of the couturier, a figure whose cachet derived from his or her status as artist-craftsman and who worked in an idiom opposed to mass production. Charles Frederick Worth, who worked in Paris from the 1860s, is generally considered to be the first modern couturier. Cultivating links with cultural elites and selling fashion as a precious and singular commodity, Worth – like those who followed him – encouraged the viewing of fashion as an art form. By the twentieth century, couturiers like Jacques Doucet and Elsa Schiaparelli had firmly established links to the art world and clung tenaciously to their own status as artists – so tenaciously, in fact, as to reveal some anxiety about that status. They were right to be anxious, for fashion sat on the edge of the deeply held divide between art and industry, with its simultaneous positioning as an art, designed by a “creator,” and a mass-produced object produced by anonymous factory workers. To use the terms of Walter Benjamin – himself deeply interested in fashion’s modernity – mass reproduction sat uneasily with claims that a form like fashion was invested with the singular “aura” of a work of art.¹ The form threatened to reveal the instability of this foundational dichotomy of modernity, which held that art and industry were opposed and insisted on the “purity” of the aesthetic against the “taint” of commerce.² As Nancy J. Troy writes, “the couture dress ... despite couturiers’ claims to the contrary, was never a unique original but rather a copy.”³ Fashion offered a vision of the ways that commerce impinged on the supposedly rarified sphere of art, and aesthetics came to shape consumer capitalism. In this sense, it was exemplary of “the experience of modernity” as, in Marshall Berman’s formulation, a dialectic of artistic modernism and industrial modernization.⁴

The tense but mutually dependent relationship between art and industry was not the only dialectic that fashion underscored. With its complex relationship to time, fashionable dress also called into question the boundaries between past, present, and future. Modernity seemed, at a rhetorical level at least, to be defined by its fetishization of the new. Cultural modernists and activists revealed their sense that they were living through the birth of a new society, defined by a new aesthetics, new orders, new ways of relating, of living. As a Russian futurist manifesto declared, encapsulating the widespread sentiment, “We are the new people of a new life.”⁵ And, too, consumerism was propelled by the promise of the ever-new, selling products on the basis of their innovation. Fashion, in one sense, had a strong kinship with the fetishization of the new, for fashion is “dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of clothes.”⁶ Though the principle of change had been embodied in fashionable dress since the medieval period, the capacity and will to innovate had expanded with the development of a modern fashion system, as both mass-produced and couture fashion began to introduce seasonal collections. In the words of the major couturier Paul Poiret, in 1914, “the very word, fashions, means something new. Fashions should always develop in an unexpected direction and proceed toward the unknown.”⁷ The fashion press reinforced the allegiance to novelty, structuring its coverage around the introduction of “new modes” and changing trends.

Yet as much as fashion was imagined, produced, desired, bought, and sold according to its perceived innovation – its undeniable emergence from the present moment – one of the things that made it so compelling to theorists of the modern was its relationship to the past. Here was another paradox. In his essay on the painter Constantin Guys as an exemplar of modernity, Baudelaire argued that Guys’s achievement was “to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory.”⁸ Seventy years later, he was followed in this vein by Benjamin, who conceived of fashion as both having “an eye for the topical” and representing “a tiger’s leap into the past.”⁹ Fashion, that is, brought together different orders of time – the past, the eternal, the present, and the future – and thus issued an implicit challenge to narratives of progress that became ideologically dominant in the nineteenth century, which viewed the past as securely bounded and isolated from the mobile present and largely dispensed with the concept of eternity as a static construct. Whereas such narratives were preeminently

modern, rooted in Enlightenment liberalism's faith in the developmental advancement of the human capacity for freedom, fashion's ubiquity ensured that a temporal counternarrative was visually and materially available. The vogue for Empire-inspired fashions in the first decade of the twentieth century serves as an excellent example. The trend was launched by Poiret, whose 1906 collection of dresses featuring the simple, columnar shape of the French Empire period (1800–1815) – and seeming to dispense with the corset – remains one of the most memorable departures in twentieth-century fashion. Poiret – who I cited above, extolling the importance of the *new* in fashion – explicitly framed this silhouette as inspired by the period of the French Revolution, proclaiming, “I waged war on the corset in the name of Liberty!”¹⁰ Thus, what was framed as innovation called on history for its symbolic force. Making the constellation of new and old even more complex in this case, of course, was the fact that Revolutionary dress itself reached into a distant past – Ancient Greece – with the aim of materially embodying democracy through self-fashioning. Poiret's radical break with dress conventions of his day, though it was framed in the rhetoric of novelty by him and others, actually constellated the present with multiple pasts and provided an alternative model of the present, of time, and of modernity itself as a temporal palimpsest. Nor was this a singular occurrence: cycling back between present and various pasts was already and continues to be central to fashion's structure. Fashion provided a strong counter to the dominant story of progress that sustained the modern era. Because it was so visually prominent, it ensured that other narratives were discernible to modern subjects, providing texture and diversity to the modern imaginary.

The turn to “the East” in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fashions also complicated temporal narratives, since the “Orient” was also considered to be caught variously outside of time or in some distant past. Yet in turning time and again to various “Eastern” sources for inspiration, fashion brought the modern body into intimate proximity with an aesthetic that conjured associations of timelessness and stasis. As Richard Martin and Harold Koda note, “[t]he Orientalist objective in dress was to cull from various Easts their spellbinding foreignness for the purposes of rendering Western dress richer and more exotic.”¹¹ One might add that because of the close association of bodies with dress, in rendering dress more “exotic,” wearers also took on some of this association. In the nineteenth century, for example, the Persian and Indian design element known as “paisley” became very popular in Britain, especially

as a print on cashmere scarves. As the ability to produce these textiles increased and they became more widely available, this design brought a certain cachet – the association with the “exotic” – to its wearers while also becoming naturalized and losing some of its orientalist connotations. In the twentieth century, major couturiers including Poiret and Mariano Fortuny were among those who borrowed liberally from design elements, fabric, and draping central to non-“Western” cultures. For his part, Venice-based designer Fortuny ventured to regions across the world, borrowing and mixing design elements from various cultures. Fortuny had extensive exposure to Italian Renaissance painting masters, and his works often seemed to integrate global design elements with an aesthetic derived from these Renaissance influences. He and other couturiers who took up orientalist themes exemplified a kind of hybrid approach to design; and in doing so, their garments troubled the boundary between the West and the mythical “East.”

It was not only haute couture, though, that appropriated design concepts from non-Western cultures. The tendency moved beyond cultural elites as it was taken up by producers and purveyors of affordable clothing for the masses. The curator of the Brooklyn Museum, Stewart Culin, for example – a recognized expert on global dress who amassed, during his tenure, a formidable costume collection at the institution – was involved in numerous industry collaborations that showcased global costume. The majority of these involved the loan of items from his collection to department stores, which used the originals in window and in-store display and offered affordable replicas for sale. Such a promotion took place at Brooklyn department store Abraham & Straus in their 1919 Blouse Week, when the store designed Abraham & Straus–branded blouses that were displayed alongside the original costumes but were distinguished by their distinctly modern silhouettes; the lines of the garments followed precisely those dominant in the fashion of the moment. Not only do these collaborations offer another fine example of the constellation of past and present in fashion, but they were also significant because they subtly opposed a dominant tendency in modern orientalist representations, whereby the paradigmatic Western subject was constituted through his distance from the imagined “Orient.” In Timothy Mitchell’s words, “what is outside is paradoxically what makes the West what it is, the excluded yet integral part of its identity and power.”¹² Since clothing has such a close relationship to the wearer’s body – and is a primary technology of identity projection – putting on an orientalist garment

involved some degree not only of cultural appropriation but of *incorporation* of the other as part of the self. This is not to suggest that hybrid clothing countered racism or orientalism or eroded the dominance of the white, Western subject in colonial relations and the orientalist imaginary – “putting on” different identities through dress was not equally available to colonized people, whose adoption of fashionable clothing was most often ridiculed.¹³ It does, though, make visible a different means by which the white subject could exercise her or his power in relation to orientalized people in modernity: by literally “putting them on” and projecting a spectacular fantasy of incorporation. Fashionable clothing provided the material for a complex negotiation of self and other across the charged boundaries of “race,” ethnicity, and nation.

Such incorporation, of course, threatened modernity’s dominant model of selfhood, subjectivity, and embodiment. Post-Enlightenment modernity was built on the idea of the self as discrete, atomized, and inherently possessed of the capacity for development. The human at the center of liberal humanism was meant to have no need for other subjects in order to actualize the self. Humanity was also, as a generation of feminist scholars has pointed out, premised on the idea of a consciousness divorced from the body. Here, then, was fashion, suggesting something quite different, “an embodied practice” that brought self together with the others, with otherness, with the world. In Joanne Entwistle’s terms, “[t]he body forms the envelope of our being in the world, and our selfhood comes from this location in our body and our experience of this. In terms of dress, [this] means acknowledging the way that dress works on our body which in turn works on and mediates the experience of self.”¹⁴ That is, dress acted as a hinge between body and world. Certainly, the subject could “express the self” with fashion, with putting something material on the body and letting the body signal identity to the world. But that subject was also, in part, *produced* by the clothing it wore, by something external to the self. Fashionable clothing, then, also drew attention to the complex relationship between the modern body and the modern self and provided a medium through which to dramatize the relationship between self and the world beyond the self. In this sense, it troubled the dominant narrative about identity as discrete and entirely self-constituted, providing glimpses of another way of conceiving of the individual and the social.

This is, indeed, one of the major reasons contemporary theorists of modernity found fashion so representative of their age: it illuminated the

interplay between individual and the social world, or, in Georg Simmel's terms, distinction and conformity. He wrote, in a 1904 essay, that fashion simultaneously represented "the tendency to social equalization [and] the desire for individual differentiation and change."¹⁵ Simmel's reference to the "desire" for change is notable here, for it connects fashion's relentlessly present-oriented tempo, its changeability, to the personal sphere of the subject. Change was not simply an abstract principle made visible by fashion. As Simmel told it, fashion showed that change was an intimately experienced phenomenon, one with personal stakes for the individual. Not only did fashion bring together subject and world, but it also could do so without sacrificing the affective or personal dimension of individual life. Fashion is as much an intimate form as a collective one. Subjects have viscerally experienced, emotional investments in their dress. Touching it, trying it on, imagining themselves in it, wearing it to project an identity: all of these were and are activities that can provoke intense responses. Clothing is, after all, linked to memory. Rebecca Arnold writes that "[f]ashion has a great resonance, acting as a collective memory; nostalgic styles are traces of the past, mapping individual and group experiences, recalling both reassuringly familiar and yet . . . upsettingly clear invocations of earlier histories."¹⁶ References in the fashion press and modernist literature, too, frequently offered a glimpse of fashion as linked to memories of days past, linking personal histories to the sweeps of epochal histories. The form was often nostalgic, not merely for a particular social world or era but for remembered personal connections and even a past self. A 1922 article from the *Gazette du Bon Ton*, for example, opined that the modes of 1875 or 1900 would return quite soon, perhaps not precisely, "but through details from that era, which was, for some of us, childhood, for some, our youth: memories full of happiness or . . . of melancholy."¹⁷

Further, the act of visually projecting an identity to the world is no trivial matter – in a world defined by its visual culture, mediated through the eye, and attentive to fashion, how one presented oneself was increasingly important. It could lead to a new sort of anxiety. Virginia Woolf's diaries beautifully capture the ambivalence that was often provoked by fashion. Woolf vacillated between extreme emotional responses to clothing and how it was perceived in the world. On one hand, she evidenced a certain fascination with clothing – "My love of clothes interests me profoundly,"¹⁸ she wrote – but this was tempered by constant references to anxiety about not dressing well: "Everything to do with dress

still frightens me . . . or at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable,”¹⁹ and, tellingly, “This is what humiliates me. To walk in Regent St, Bond Str &c: & be notably less well dressed than other people.”²⁰ These anxious confessions speak to the very real way in which the increasing importance of fashion and its intimate relevance to the self brought with it an attendant host of concerns about how one might be positioned and read within a variety of cultural settings.

A further anxiety arose from the way that fashion seemed to complicate and even undermine class and other social distinctions. A 1935 article in American fashion and beauty magazine *Harper's Bazaar* sketched a picture of “the female of the species.” The cosmopolitan young woman, the author asserted in this somewhat negative appraisal, self-fashioned without tethering herself to any single class or milieu: “the ideal is to be beyond positive identity as this or that.”²¹ Clothing enabled the woman to remake herself, potentially giving her some control over how she would be read and interpreted in relation to various social markers. Further, with the deterioration of strict sartorial codes in the modern era, as many pointed out, the dominant anxiety was not about women merely dressing “to be beyond positive identity”; it was about how easily one could dress as “someone else.” Fashion thus bore yet another contradiction: it was seen to represent the depth or interiority of the person – a trope constantly reinforced in the fashion press, which exhorted women to express themselves through dress – and yet it simultaneously offered the distinct possibility of self-invention or reinvention, imitation, masquerade – in short, “deceit.” In claiming allegiance with some concept of a “true self” all the while enabling masquerade, fashion discourses subtly undermined the very concept of a core or essential self. In this, fashion was aligned with currents in the broader modernist culture. Nietzsche's philosophy, for instance, invoked femininity as the sign of a modern deconstruction of the style-versus-substance paradigm; he pointed to the fallacy of the very concept of deep interiority “hidden” behind an ornamental surface.²² Fashion was in this instance a fine manifestation of influential intellectual tendencies.

Fashion's affinity for masquerade and identity play seemed to open up the potential for wearers to transgress cultural boundaries in a wide range of settings, a fact that was regarded variously as liberating and threatening. As Mary Louise Roberts traces in the case of France, for example, the panic that accompanied changing clothing and hairstyles for women in the 1920s was tied to the perceived erosion of visually identifiable

markers to differentiate them from men. She quotes a French student in 1925, brimming with anxiety about the difficulty of interpreting women wearing the new fashions: “Can one define *la jeune fille moderne*? No, no more than the waist on the dresses she wears. Young women of today are difficult to locate precisely . . . it would be a barbarism, in my opinion, to call our pretty *parisiennes* young women. These beings – without breasts, without hips, without ‘underwear,’ who smoke, work, argue and fight exactly like boys . . . – these aren’t young women.”²³ Here the commentator suggests that women’s fashion (among other visual and behavioral markers) contributed not only to the impossibility of defining women but to the possibility of their *misidentification* as boys or men. As a 1922 *Gazette du Bon Ton* article on women dressing in masculine-inspired styles suggested, the fashions were leading feminist women, in particular, to “disguise” themselves as men.²⁴ The word “disguise” is telling, of course, because it suggests that women were seen to have an ulterior motive for their adoption of changing fashions: they would benefit in some way from their apparent masculine masquerade, perhaps by claiming some of the power associated with men, surely an anxiety-producing proposition for many. And so here is another area in which fashion trafficked in the instability of deeply entrenched cultural oppositions, this time highlighting the shifting relationship between masculinity and femininity in modernity.

Stylistic change was only, of course, one of many ways that modern fashion called attention to or even subtly eroded boundaries between appropriately “masculine” and “feminine” ways of being in the world. The very *public* culture of fashion provided another very important challenge. Alongside the development of the technological capacity to produce fashion came the public spaces in which to sell it: the department stores that are explored at length in Elizabeth Outka’s chapter in this volume first arose across the Western world in the 1840s. The title of Émile Zola’s 1883 department store novel *The Ladies’ Paradise* (*Au Bonheur des Dames*), inspired by pioneering Parisian store Bon Marché, hints at the implications of the development of these massive and lavish temples of consumption: they were imagined as spaces for women. Often these stores were explicitly designed with the female consumer in mind; they contained tea rooms, lounges, and bathrooms explicitly designed for the comfort of women shoppers. Though they may be so naturalized as to appear unremarkable today, these developments contributed to the gendered revitalization of public space. Class-bound ideologies of public and

private prevailed in the nineteenth century, relegating the ideal woman to the domestic sphere and reserving the public sphere for men (of course, women of color and working-class white women already negotiated the public sphere daily in their real lives). Yet here were department stores, inviting respectable women into public life and public spaces. As Erika Rappaport argues with respect to London – and her argument is generalizable across many modern metropolises – discourses of shopping as leisure, of the city as a site of consumption “altered the way many Victorians viewed their city, produced new notions of desire, and rewrote gender ideals, producing a bourgeois femininity that was born within the public realm.”²⁵ Rappaport shows how particular districts of a city, when they were oriented around fashion and consumption, effectively became feminized. The Ladies’ Mile in New York City is a particularly good example; this was an area of department and luxury fashion stores centered on approximately one mile of Broadway. The presence of an entire shopping district organized around fashion signaled the uncontroversial entry into public space of a certain class of white women. It shows how perceptions of fashion and its consumption as fundamentally feminine did not merely reproduce a set of gendered stereotypes but also can be said to have enabled a new set of possibilities for bourgeois women.

It was not only the spatial organization of cities and their shopping districts in the nineteenth century that revolutionized women’s relation to public life; so too did the means of displaying and visualizing fashion in such spaces. Advances in technologies for merchandising – cheaper plate glass for display windows, electric lights, new display conventions that merged commercial principles with aesthetic ones, such as the use of surrealism in display windows – led to the proliferation of particular kinds of visual interactions with fashion, especially in larger metropolitan centers; Outka’s chapter on consumerism in this volume traces these at some length. William Leach situates these technological developments in the context of related changes in public spaces ranging from opera houses to hotels to museums, all of which required and indeed generated a new sort of visual literacy for the consumer, whether they were consuming an art form or merchandise.²⁶ One of the most significant characteristics of this new visual regime as it related to fashion and consumption was its feminization. Window displays, for instance, were not neutral tableaux; they almost invariably featured women’s clothing and female mannequins. So did the displays inside of stores. Displays were matched by developments in the print culture that marked the increasing

inclusion of photographs of living women in the pages of women's and fashion magazines in the 1920s – where they replaced illustrations – and developments in street culture that saw more and more women pictured in advertisements. Altogether, a spectacular culture of images of fashionably clad women, most often using their bodies to sell things, came to pervade public life. Christopher Breward quotes J. B. Priestley's 1937 novel, *Angel Pavement*, to capture the significance of fashion's feminization of everyday life in the metropolis of London:

Everything he saw spoke to him of women and love. The shops he passed were brilliant with hats and clothes that Lena might wear; they showed him her stockings and underclothes; they were piled high with her entrancing little shoes; they invited him to look at her powder bowls, her lipstick, her scent bottles; there was nothing she wore, nothing she touched, they did not thrust under their blazing electric lights . . . The very newspapers, under cover of a pretended interest in Palm Beach or feminine athletics, gave him day by day photographs of nearly naked girls with figures like Lena's.²⁷

This feminization of the cityscape through the presence of women was an intensification of a nineteenth-century phenomenon that was often captured in paintings, especially those depicting Parisian life: the informal “parade” of fashionable dress on city streets, when people went out to look at others and to be looked at themselves. Fashion was a key ingredient in the intensification of a visually oriented or “ocularcentric” culture in modernity, in which visual spectacles functioned as a major source of knowledge about the world. Thus not only were women actually pervading public space through their shopping and consumption, but femininity also imprinted the visual organization of modern public space in significant and spectacular ways, with fashion and dress mediating this entry into a formerly masculinized terrain.

Though there was anxiety about the supposed erosion of gender roles that this entry into public space effected, it was also recognized as an inevitable part of everyday life in modern cities, and enterprise often capitalized on the association of fashionable women with mobility, speed, and urban street life. Consider the prevalence of women in advertisements for motor vehicles. These were found throughout fashion magazines alongside articles about new styles that would facilitate women motor-ing, but such images were also featured in other types of publications. Mary Louise Roberts notes, in fact, that in France women were featured

in automobile advertisements much more frequently than were men. A survey of auto ads from the United States seems to bear out the same imbalance. Such representations, as Roberts notes, “created the image of a woman who leads a busy, fast-paced, and independent life, and who is empowered by the “mannish” fashions she wears.”²⁸ Advertisers recognized the market created when middle-class women entered the public sphere of consumption through displays of their fashionability; women had come to be imagined as quintessential consumers not just of fashion but of everything. They also, crucially, recognized that a fashionably clad woman had become a selling point in itself – hence sometimes cars were not even featured in ads for automakers, with the ads using fashionable women as objects of desire, thereby making them, in a sense, interchangeable with the goods they were selling. In this way fashion prompted a different kind of entry into the public sphere. In making women coextensive with the clothing they wore – often in order to sell something ostensibly unrelated – advertisements that mobilized fashion positioned femininity and women’s bodies as commodities on the very same market in which fashion was bought and sold. Like Walter Benjamin’s figure of the prostitute, the use of fashionable women’s bodies in advertising made them “seller and sold in one.”²⁹ This connected them to the public sphere of commerce in undeniable ways, and it cemented the feminization of the spectacular visual culture that was so central to modernity.

Another visually mediated development in which dress and fashion positioned people in relation to central binaries of modernity – including those of masculinity and femininity, heterosexual and homosexual, and public and private – took place at the level of sexual subcultures. The growth of a range of sartorial codes and forms of expression took place as communities developed around newly imagined sexual identities (such as “sexual invert” and “homosexual”). For some working-class women in the United States, for instance, the development of “butch-fem(me)” (or, in some African-American communities, “stud-fem”) dynamics allowed for a distinct, original way of organizing and signaling sexual desire, one that was largely facilitated by dress. As butch women dressed in masculine-identified clothing, and fem(me)s in conventionally feminine clothing, they forged means of connecting that allowed them both to be visible to each other in the right milieus and to protect themselves in more hostile spaces. Clothing thus played an important role in the development of modern sexual minorities; it

was a medium that could both reveal and conceal varieties of sexual desire and gender expression. In this way, dress enabled what was, for queer people in the early part of the twentieth century, a rare ability to communicate with and find each other.

Of course, precisely because dress facilitated such connections, it also fell under the scrutiny of authorities who recognized its capacity to support burgeoning sexual minority communities. Across the United States, for instance, local laws that regulated clothing along the lines of gender were in effect well into the twentieth century. To take one of hundreds of instances, Ordinance 816 was adopted in 1892 in Oakland, California, making it “unlawful for any person to appear in any public place naked or in a dress not belonging to his or her sex, or in an indecent or lewd dress.”³⁰ In some places, laws were even more specific and made it illegal not to wear at least three items of clothing understood as “appropriate” to one’s biological sex. These laws were enforced, often brutally, and often in raids of the bars that had become significant gathering spaces for lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people.³¹ The enforcement of laws about dress suggests once again that it was a site of significant anxiety about the erosion of social distinctions, in this case both those between masculinity and femininity and between homosexuality and heterosexuality – the latter because both butch and femme dress suggested that lesbians could potentially “pass” as something they “were not” (straight men or women).

Indeed, as modernity accelerated, dress came into its own as a visually ubiquitous consumer item that allowed people an unprecedented degree of control over their self-presentation. Its facilitation of self-fashioning provoked potential “misreadings” of identity and pointed obliquely to the complexity of identifications in a modern context that was dependent on the organization and management of easily recognizable types. Though it occasionally seemed to confirm these types, fashion’s propensity for playfulness threw them into question, just as it threw into question a whole host of other seeming certainties about the changing social order of modernity. The interest of the form for theorists of the modern becomes clear: they turned to it over and over again because it provided a powerful key to the complexity that undergirded the homogenizing ideological tendencies of the age. Contemporary historians of modernist culture might take a cue from them: using fashion as a lens through which to excavate the early twentieth century unearths the inconsistencies, contradictions, and overall richness of the relationship between

ideology and everyday life, ensuring that we bring needed texture to our accounts of the modern.

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, translated by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), 223.
- 2 Elizabeth Outka's chapter on modern landscapes of consumption, in this volume, exposes this binary at some length.
- 3 Nancy J. Troy, "Paul Poiret's Minaret Style: Originality, Reproduction and Art in Fashion," *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 2 (2002): 118.
- 4 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).
- 5 Hylaea Group, "Untitled," from *A Trap for Judges* (Sadok sud'ei), 2 (St. Petersburg: Zhuravl', 1913). In Anna Lawton, ed., *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), p. 54.
- 6 Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, 2nd edition. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3.
- 7 Paul Poiret, "Crinolines," *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1914, 12.
- 8 Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. P.E. Charvet (London: Viking, 2006), 402.
- 9 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, translated by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), 263.
- 10 Paul Poiret, *King of Fashion: The Autobiography of Paul Poiret*, translated by Stephen Haden Guest [1931] (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 36.
- 11 Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 12.
- 12 Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 166, quoted in Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49.
- 13 See Liz Conor, "The 'Primitive' Woman in the Late Colonial Scene," in *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005): 175–208.
- 14 Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleishy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 336.
- 15 Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *International Quarterly* 10 (October 1904): 133.
- 16 Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 7.
- 17 Jeanne Ramon Fernandez, "De Mil Huit Cent Soixante Quinze à Mil Neuf Cent," *Gazette du Bon Ton*, June 1922: 148. ("Il me semble voir venir à nous, d'ici une ou deux saisons, peut-être, non pas l'exact mode de 1875 ou de 1900, mais des détails se rattachant aux atours de ce temps, qui fut pour quelques-unes d'entre nous l'enfance et pour d'autres la jeunesse: souvenirs plein de gaîté ou... de mélancolie.")
- 18 Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1985), 68.
- 19 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977–84), Vol. 3, 21.

- 20 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 75.
- 21 Louis Bromfield, "The Female of the Species," *Harper's Bazaar*, October 1935, 79.
- 22 See, for example, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). In fact, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche famously used an item of women's clothing – the veil – to explore this question.
- 23 M. Numa Sadoul, excerpted from "Une controverse: L'émancipation de la jeune fille moderne est-elle un progrès réel?" *Progrès civique*, June 13, 1925, Dossier Féminisme, XXI^{ème} Siècle, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Cited in Mary Louise Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's Fashion in 1920s France," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 3 (1993): 671.
- 24 Roger Boutet de Monvel, "Les Masculines," *Gazette du Bon Ton*, May 1922, 101.
- 25 Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.
- 26 See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993), chapter 2.
- 27 J.B. Priestley, *Angel Pavement* (London: Heinemann, 1937), 501–02, quoted in Christopher Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Berg, 2004), 111–12.
- 28 Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisited," 675.
- 29 Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Exposé of 1935>," in *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 10.
- 30 This law is examined in Joan W. Howarth, "First and Last Chance: Looking for Lesbians in Fifties Bar Cases," *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies* 5 (1995): 160.
- 31 For documentation of such enforcement, see Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).