

'Malcolm Barnard's *Fashion Theory* is more than just "an introduction". He sets out a clear account of major theorists' ideas in the context of key writers on fashion, and shows how some of the most abstract theory is implicated in the merest comment on, or second glance at, the clothes people wear. This book will be an invaluable resource for students of cultural studies, the social sciences and of course the many practical disciplines that study fashion. Anyone who wants to get seriously involved with fashion or clothing needs to be able to understand the ideas behind them – and Barnard's book is the go-to place to get that understanding.'

Tim Dant, Professor of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK

'Malcolm Barnard's *Fashion Theory: an introduction* is the most comprehensive, convincing and yet accessible book imaginable as an introduction geared specifically for students in fashion design. The book is unique, lucid and utterly concrete in its message that no statement about fashion is innocent. Barnard manages to explicate not only the inevitably political dimension of fashion, but – and partly as an extension of this – to convey a deep and multidimensional sense of the relationship between fashion and representation.'

Brian Seitz, Professor of Philosophy, Babson College, USA

Fashion Theory

An introduction

Malcolm Barnard

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developed at an incredible pace. Marketing studies are also becoming more sophisticated and the use of stochastic models, Markov chains and epidemic theory in the prediction and explanation of trends in dress has been documented since the early 1970s (Wills and Christopher 1973: 17ff). Without some knowledge of those natural and mathematical sciences, one will simply have nothing to say about those textiles and those products. In order to have something to say about these textiles and the clothes that are made from them, one will need to know what is going on in the natural and mathematical sciences.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced fashion, theory and fashion theory. It has outlined some definitions of fashion and it has shown the practical and visual roots of what we know as theory. And it has argued a case concerning the relation of fashion to theory in fashion theory. The argument has been that we are always in theory: from the most anecdotal and entertaining story about fashion to the driest and most academic thesis, we are using theories. Systems of heuristic concepts and theoretical constructions are producing what we say. Everything we say is produced and supported by theory. This argument will be borne out in all of the following chapters, as I try to introduce the topics by means of some apparently innocent or everyday account and demonstrate the theory or theories 'behind' them. The following chapter will begin to think about what fashion is.

Further reading

Kawamura, Y. (2005) *Fashion-ology*, Oxford, Berg; chapters 2 and 3.
Rose, G. (2012) *Visual Methodologies*, London, Sage.
Svendsen, L. (2006) *Fashion: A Philosophy*, London, Reaktion Books.
Williams, M. (2000) *Science and Social Science*, London, Routledge.

chapter 3

What fashion is and is not

Introduction

At the time of writing in May 2013 the question 'What is fashion?' has its own Facebook community page, which is itself quite fashionable, and it is liked by 33 people, which suggests it is not yet a mass or a popular fashion. The page does not provide much of an answer to the question but it provides a link to the Wikipedia page, which says that fashion is a popular style, practice or trend and that it is 'clothing generally'. Closer inspection of the Wikipedia page tells us that it has 'multiple issues' with the notion of fashion and that it may not contain 'verifiable information'. A blogger on a website for teenagers says that 'fashion is my unique ability to express my emotions'. Another says confidently that fashion is definitely not self-mutilation. And yet another says that fashion is brands (blog-trends.com). Elsewhere, an ex-editor of French *Elle* says that fashion talks, that it is a state of mind, a spirit, an 'extension of one's self' and that, whether you prefer hip-hop or Chanel, fashion translates self-esteem into a personal style. She also says that it is not to be taken too seriously (www.pbs.org/newshour/infocus/fashion/whatisfashion.html; last accessed November 2013).

There is clearly not much agreement here and there are indeed 'multiple issues' involved in the definition of fashion. We are confronted by a range of conventional, contradictory and mistaken references to style, styles, emotions, culture, the self, the mind, talk, expression, brands, mutilations and spirit. However, these attempts at definition provide hints toward, and elements of, a sensible and useful account of what fashion is and is not.

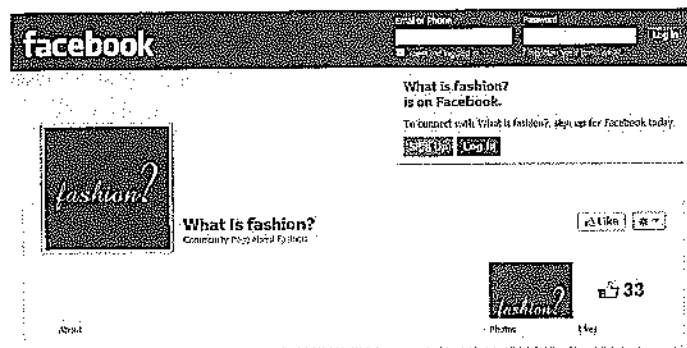


Figure 3.1 Facebook Community Page, 'What is Fashion?' May 2013. (www.facebook.com/pages/What-is-fashion/118580781564958)

For example, while neither fashion nor individual garments can be said to literally 'talk', there is little doubt that they communicate, or that they are used to communicate. One of the bloggers reported here says that she uses fashion to express her emotions: emotion is being communicated through or by what this young woman wears. Other people use fashion to communicate other things: cultural membership is indicated, for example, in the reference to hip-hop and Chanel. Different people will construct and communicate membership of different cultural groups by wearing different garments. Baggy jeans worn low will communicate membership of some 'hip-hop' cultures and the signature suit and heavily logoed handbag will communicate one's allegiance to Chanel. Similarly, while it is hard to believe that a mass-produced garment, worn by thousands of people, contributes anything towards anyone's 'uniqueness' or sense of self, the impression and the experience of that unique self persist and must be explained. One's sense of identity and uniqueness easily survives wearing the same jeans or having the same haircut as one's friends.

And while the idea that fashion translates that sense of self into style, or that it is an extension of one's self, might be dismissed as involving too much calculation or an overly mechanical conception of fashion, we have to use something with which to communicate and we must use something with which to construct ourselves as unique and individual members of cultures. This example is slightly different from, and slightly trickier than, the other examples, but it is no less a part of what fashion is and is not. Fashion is not quite so readily or happily understood as a prosthetic as it is understood as communication, or as expression of some unique self. And the self is not so readily understood as the product or construction of

that prosthesis as it is understood as some natural essence that we have, or are. However, fashion as communication is a cultural phenomenon: the garments that we wear are not us but they are things we use to represent or stand for ourselves. A garment, then, is something that stands for, or represents, something else – oneself, the self, one's emotions, identity and so on. Therefore those garments are tools and ultimately prosthetic devices that make possible the representation or translation of an idea or an experience of the self and of ourselves, and thereby communicate it to other people.

This chapter will investigate what fashion is and what it is not. It will introduce the relation of fashion to our ideas of art and design – many people think that fashion is art, but all of our colleges and universities offer *Fashion Design* degrees and nobody reads for a *Fashion Art* degree. It will also introduce the idea that there is something that is not fashion – something that some theorists have called anti-fashion. What makes something fashion or anti-fashion has been analysed as a product of different kinds of society and of different conceptions of the ways in which we are members of those different societies. This chapter will also introduce the idea of what we wear as a tool or prosthesis – as something that is not us but which is used to construct and communicate ourselves – something outside us and other than us that makes us possible. This last will be followed up and developed in Chapter 6 on fashion as communication and Chapter 8 on fashion and the body.

Fashion and art

Art galleries, websites, blogs, academic journals, popular magazines and all kinds of newspaper regularly ask the question, 'Is Fashion Art?'. In 2012, the website *artinfo.com* reported Karl Lagerfeld claiming that fashion is not art and that he is against showing fashion in museums and galleries (Binlot 2012). Valerie Steele, who edits the academic journal *Fashion Theory* and is chief curator of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, employs a form of *ad hominem* argument, saying that when people of the same 'calibre' as Lagerfeld, Miuccia Prada and Rei Kawakubo say that fashion is not art, it is difficult to disagree. *Ad hominem* arguments are hardly arguments at all, of course, and it is the easiest thing to disagree with the claim that fashion is not art. Pierre Bergé, who was one of the founders of the Yves Saint Laurent company, disagrees with the argument and contradicts himself twice in the same statement when he says that fashion is not art but that some fashion designers are artists. The fashion designers Yves Saint Laurent, Christian Dior, Balenciaga and Chanel were artists, according to Bergé, but he does not explain how it is that what these artists

produce is not art. He develops and refines this nonsense by adding a potentially offensive reference to sex, saying that fashion only exists when it is worn by women, 'otherwise it is not an art' (Binlot 2012). Again, quite how the sex of the wearer turns clothing into fashion and design into art is not made clear.

If fashion designers are poor guides as to whether fashion is art, fashion journalists and editors are little better. Sung Bok Kim notes that Diana Vreeland, who was editor of both *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, believes that fashion is not art. Vreeland says that art is 'extraordinary' but fashion is not; she says that art is something 'spirituelle' but fashion is not; she says that art has 'intangible vitality' but fashion has not (Sung Bok Kim 1998: 53). What Vreeland does not and cannot say is what any of these words mean or how they may be used in relation to the things that people wear. 'Extraordinary' means outside or beyond the ordinary, 'spirituelle' means 'not material' in French and 'intangible' means untouchable. They refer to areas beyond our experience but because they refer to areas beyond our possible experience, they are ultimately completely meaningless and inapplicable to that experience. These precious and vacuous terms cannot be used to define either art or fashion and they cannot, therefore, be used to distinguish art from fashion.

In slightly more academic territories, Richard Martin argues in the journal *Fashion Theory* that fashion and art are 'similar if not identical impulses' (Martin 1999: 111). He cites Viktor and Rolf's numbered, limited edition plastic shopping bags, white dresses, dresses made from collage and modernist dresses as evidence that fashion can deal with its products as though they were art. The argument seems to be that, by numbering and limiting the number of garments or objects that are produced, as in a run of artists' prints, those garments and items are turned into art. We will see in a moment that the reproducibility of 'art' objects is actually one of the stronger arguments for not calling those objects 'art'. And Susan Ferleger Brades, Director of the Hayward Gallery in London, argues that fashion and art 'overlap' and that they are in pursuit of a shared set of visual discoveries (Ferleger Brades, in Hayward Gallery 1998, Preface). This is not quite arguing the identity of fashion and art but it is using the pursuit of visual discoveries to affirm some common ground; the novelty of what is thus 'discovered' is presumably what is important here. What is abundantly clear is that the relation between fashion and art is far from being well understood.

The notion of function is often appealed to in the attempt to distinguish art from design, and Alice Rawsthorn and Zandra Rhodes use it in their debate over whether fashion is a true art form (Rawsthorn 2003, Rhodes 2003). Rawsthorn says that 'fashion has a practical purpose, whereas art does not: the function of fashion as an 'item of clothing intended to be worn' determines that fashion is not art. The argument is simple:

- art has no function
- fashion has a function
- therefore fashion is not art,

There are two problems with this simple argument. First, it is not clear that the 'item of clothing' is the same as a piece of fashion and Rawsthorn is sliding from one to the other here. The function of fashion is not quite the same as the function of clothing: the function of an item of clothing may be to keep our bodies warm and dry, but (while it may be a side-effect) it is never the purpose of an item of fashion to keep a body warm and dry. Every modern and Western attempt to keep a body warm and dry will be subject to fashion, but this merely proves the point concerning the difference between clothing and fashion. Second, it is not true that art has no function. Art has many functions: it constructs, communicates and reproduces the owner's social, cultural and economic position, for example. By purchasing, owning and displaying one or other kind of art, one identifies oneself as a member of a certain socio-economic class and as a member of a certain culture. The purchase of the art reproduces the people and the institutions that exist to produce and sell art works (artists and art markets). These are the social, cultural and economic functions of art. Art also functions aesthetically; its function may be to draw our attention to the nature of our own aesthetic and sensory experience. And art functions communicatively. It is surely a commonplace to say that artists express themselves through their art and that art is meaningful. Fashion also performs precisely these functions and, therefore, art and fashion cannot be differentiated on the basis of art having no function.

Rhodes takes a different view and argues that having a function does not preclude the possibility of something being art. She believes that fashion can be an art form, despite its having a practical function. If a painting were to be made into a fresco, 'a part of a wall', she asks, 'would you say it was not art because it was practical?'. The implication is that we would want to call it art, despite its having a practical function. Fashion on her account is, therefore, an 'applied art' and it can be opposed to 'fine art'. However, it is not the 'art' that is acting as the wall, or that has a practical function: it is not the 'art' that helps to keep the ceiling up and it is not, therefore, in spite of the function of the art that we want to call the fresco art. The colours and shapes of a painting may have been incorporated into some wet plaster but the colours and shapes are not the 'art' and it is not the 'art' that makes the wall and stops the ceiling and upper floors falling down. Therefore, it is not in spite of the function that we want to call it art – because, as part of the wall, it has no function.

There is a hint, in Viktor and Rolf's numbered and limited-edition bags and dresses (noted above) of a satisfactory answer to the question whether

fashion is art or not. The hint refers to the notion of reproducibility and reproduction, and this notion is dealt with in Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Writing in 1936, Benjamin claims that art possesses 'aura' and that reproduction destroys aura. He is writing about mechanical reproduction, which includes machine-made prints and objects, but the electronic reproduction of CAD, word docs, jpegs, TIFFs and mpegs also destroys aura. Aura is the sense of uniqueness and authenticity that is felt whenever one confronts a work of art – an oil painting or a sculpture, for example. There is only one original of any oil painting or sculpture and that work of art exists uniquely 'at the place where it happens to be'. This uniqueness is the cause and the product of the history of the object, the changes in condition and ownership it has undergone. Authenticity is also in some sense the product of that history – authenticity is the presence of the art work as that presence is manifested in the patina, for example, or in the provenance of the work (Benjamin 1992: 214). Aura is the product of a work of art's position in a tradition or its role in ritual (Benjamin 1992: 214, 217). A painting or a sculpture will always have been made as part of a history, with an awareness of what has gone before in the tradition and as a response to that tradition. There is an element of ritual here in that the sequence is unrepeatable (un-reproducible) and the point of it is to be there at the moment.

Aura, the sense of uniqueness and authenticity, is destroyed by or 'withers' in the age of mechanical reproduction (ib.: 215). Therefore, mechanically produced and reproducible 'art works' are not, in fact, art because they do not possess aura. Mechanically (re)producible images and objects have no aura because they have no uniqueness and no authenticity: they are not part of a tradition or a ritual. As mechanically (re)producible, these objects and images are available in many copies or editions and this availability precludes any uniqueness and any role in tradition or ritual. Machine-made and reproduced images and objects may exist in many copies all over the world; they have no special role in a tradition or ritual. They thus have no aura. Baudrillard's example of the wedding ring sheds a little light on this process. The wedding ring is a unique object and all its meaning and importance is the product of its part in a ritual, which happened once in two people's lives. In contrast, costume jewellery and fashionable rings, accessories, exist in many editions and copies and they have no part in ritual and no part in history (see Baudrillard 1981: 66–7 and Chapter 5).

The consequences of these thoughts for our account of fashion may be becoming clear. As mechanically (re)producible, most of the things we wear and all fashion will not count as 'art'. Most of the things we wear will not count as art because they will be the products of mechanical production and reproduction. All fashion will not count as art because for a fashion to exist the items that are fashionable have to be available for many people

to wear and, therefore, they will also have to have been made in multiple copies. Existing in, or as, multiple copies or editions, those garments will not have aura and they will not be art. However, some of the things we wear may be counted as art. Anything that is bespoke would count as having aura and, therefore, as being art. A Savile Row suit, or a dress made by hand for one particular woman would also have to be considered to be art on this account. The bespoke Savile Row suit and the handmade dress exist only as unique items; they are the products of activities that could certainly be called rituals and they have very particular places in traditions and in the history of people's lives. The process of visiting one's tailor or dressmaker, discussing the material and style, being measured, wearing the suit or the dress for the first time and having any alterations and corrections seen to, is quite clearly a ritual. It is also a ritual that stands in a long and highly respected tradition of non-mechanical clothes production.

Consequently, most of the things we wear and all fashion items are not art. Because art consists in one-off, unique productions, which have a place in ritual and tradition and which possess aura as a result of that place, the mechanically (re)produced clothes that we wear are not art. Anything that is bespoke, however, which is handmade once for us and us alone, may be considered to be art. Such items will be the products of their place and role in traditions and rituals of clothes making and they will have authenticity and uniqueness as a result of those places and roles. They will, in short, have aura.

Fashion and design

If all fashion is not art, then it must be something else. The something else that is conceptually and dichotomously opposed to art is design. We might, therefore, be encouraged to think of fashion as design. We would not be alone; as has been noted, colleges and universities offer qualifications in fashion design, not fashion art.

One reason for this has been suggested above and it concerns function. One of the arguments noted above was that art is different from design because design has a function or functions and art does not. This was shown to be nonsense, as art clearly has all sorts of functions: it has social, cultural, economic and aesthetic functions, for example. On what is perhaps a 'lower' level of functionality, fashion also has residual or minimal 'practical' or body-related functions. Although not strictly operating as fashion, the clothes we wear will protect us to some extent from extremes of temperature. They will have some minimal function in maintaining bodily functions, therefore. Also not strictly operating as fashion, they will also have the function of maintaining culturally appropriate levels of modesty or display. Fashion,

therefore, can be considered to be design, because it has all these various functions.

While these debates start from wondering whether fashion is design or not, in 2009 the designer Philippe Starck began a debate by insisting that some ready-to-wear clothing he had designed was not fashion (Davies 2009). Starck claimed that 'I will never be idiotic enough to do fashion'. His argument concerns the disposability and ephemerality of fashion: the clothes he has designed are not to be considered as disposable or ephemeral and they are, therefore, not fashion. He claims that his knit dresses, cashmere and jackets are 'classic', sustainable and 'impervious to the petty constraints of *la mode*'. The notion of the fashion classic is an odd one and it will crop up in this volume again in Chapter 5 and Chapter 12. A classic garment is one that is claimed to be outside of time, or to be 'fashionable' in every time. This is clearly contradictory: fashion is only the movement from one garment to another in time, and the idea that a garment can remain fashionable throughout all time makes no sense. It will also be argued later that what is claimed to be a 'classic' is always merely the passing taste of one group that is being passed off as the taste of all groups. The notion of the classic is thus related to political power and to the social dominance of one group who are trying to impose their class-specific taste as a universal taste. If there can be no such thing as a classic and if everything is therefore fashion, then Starck's designs must also be fashion and he must be quite idiotic enough to 'do' fashion, just like the rest of us.

It has also been pointed out that some of the functions of fashion are social, cultural, economic and aesthetic functions. Fashion's social function has always been to indicate either membership or the desired membership of a specific, usually higher, social class. Fashion's cultural function has always been to construct and indicate membership of certain cultural groups: Goth, hip-hop, casual and punk are the names of cultural groups whose identity is obviously constructed through the use of fashion. Thorstein Veblen's (1992) late nineteenth-century account of the economic functions of fashion is one of the foundations of fashion studies: the notion of conspicuous consumption and the practice of conspicuous waste are both economic phenomena and essential elements of what fashion is. And it is often almost impossible to imagine what the outrageous and impossible creations that are seen at every new catwalk show are for if it is not to challenge the audience's aesthetic prejudices. Art cannot be different from design on the ground that design has a function and art does not, because both art and design have functions.

A second and slightly less convincing reason why fashion may be said to be design concerns the anonymity of the artist or designer. We are familiar with the idea of the artist as a named individual and art has operated since the Renaissance on the basis that the producer of the work, the artist, be

identified and named. Design has often not operated in this way. Unless one's wallpaper is 'famous' it is unlikely that one will know the name of the designer. William Morris's wallpaper designs are famous in this way and companies with the rights to reproduce his designs will profit from pointing out that they are by William Morris. However, most wallpaper is not identified with a named designer. Similarly, it is unlikely that one knows the name of the person who designed the birthday or Christmas cards that one sends, or the labels on every product in the supermarket. And so it is with the things one wears: it is unlikely (unless they are called 'designer' or they are named) that one will know the name of the person who designed them. Design in general is more often than not 'anonymous' and we do not know the name of the person who designed it. On this basis, as we do not know the name of the person who designed most, if not all, of the things we wear, fashion is design and not art.

Fashion understood as design thus deconstructs the distinction between nature and culture. The argument is not simple but it is worth setting it out. It begins from the idea that there is no version or conception of the human subject that does not rely on our using some tool or design, something that is not natural and that is not us, in order to exist. Clothing and fashion are not me and they are not naturally occurring parts of me, but in order to appear fully or properly human, I have to wear some clothing or other and that clothing is what makes fashion. There is, therefore, no natural understanding or version of us that is not made possible by that which is not us and that which is not natural. Fashion may, therefore, be said to have effectively and comprehensively deconstructed the nature/culture dichotomy.

Thinking of fashion as design is to think of it as having a function, or a set of functions. To think of fashion as having a function is to think of fashion as a tool. And to think of fashion as a tool is to think of it as a prosthetic. A prosthetic is something that is not us but which we use, which is added to us, and without which we would consider ourselves incomplete. These ideas will be explored in more detail in the section on fashion as prosthesis below.

Fashion and anti-fashion

The terms fashion and anti-fashion are not ways to begin describing the difference between people who 'love' fashion and people who 'hate' it so much that they try not to wear anything that could possibly be taken or mistaken for fashion. The distinction between fashion and anti-fashion is also not to do with deliberately wearing flares when straight legs are in or wearing 'A'-line skirts when 'H'-line or 'Tulip' skirts are in. The distinction

is another way of distinguishing fashion from what is not fashion. These terms are probably most familiar from Ted Polhemus and Lynn Procter's (1978) book, called *Fashion & Anti-Fashion*, which has been updated and republished under Polhemus's name alone, with the same title but a slightly different subtitle from the earlier volume (Polhemus 2011). However, the idea of distinguishing fashion from anti-fashion, and of linking the ideas to two different conceptions or types of society and, ultimately, to two different conceptions and experiences of time, may be traced back to Georg Simmel's 1904 essay 'Fashion'.

In this essay, Simmel argues that 'two social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion' and that, if either of these tendencies is missing from a society, then 'fashion will not be formed' in that society (Simmel 1971: 301). Simmel is arguing that the existence of fashion is made possible by one kind of society and not by others. The first of the social tendencies is the need for isolation, our need to be separate from others, different from those around us and not part of the crowd; Simmel calls this the 'differentiating impulse'. The second tendency is our need for union, to be with others, sharing things with those around us and part of a group; Simmel calls this the 'socializing impulse' (Simmel 1971). Among what Simmel unfortunately refers to as 'savages' and 'primitive races', the socializing impulse will be much stronger than the differentiating impulse and fashion will not be formed. In such societies, there will be a much simpler class structure, possibly involving only one class or caste, and people will all belong happily to it with no need or desire to distinguish or differentiate themselves from their fellow members. What the members of these simple societies wear is not fashion, therefore, and it may be distinguished from fashion. And, among what Simmel calls the 'classes of civilized races', where the 'danger of absorption' into the group is felt, the differentiating impulse will be stronger and as a result fashion will be formed. In such societies, there will be a complex and hierarchical class structure, and when people feel that they are becoming too much a part of their class, the possibility and the desirability of signalling their difference will be made possible by fashion. What the members of these complex societies wear, therefore, is fashion. Different kinds of society, differentiated by the existence or not of the two impulses, are the bases of Simmel's explanation of the conditions of fashion and they may be used to distinguish fashion from non- or even anti-fashion.

The different kinds of society are also explained in relation to different conceptions and experiences of time. This is made clear when Simmel says that fashion 'always occupies the dividing line between the past and the future' (1971: 303). According to Simmel, in complex societies, where the differentiating impulse exists alongside the socializing impulse, the need for the new is stronger than in simple societies. This is because simple

societies have no need for 'new impressions and forms of life'. Consequently, simple societies do not experience the temporal process in which something becomes fashionable and almost immediately 'goes to its doom' (Simmel 1971: 302-3). There is a connection, for Simmel, between the simpleness of the society, the absence of the differentiating impulse and the experience of time. Such simple societies do not experience time as a process in which things come and go as fashion. Complex societies, in which the differentiating impulse is present, do experience time as a process in which things come and go: as soon as something is understood as fashionable, it is 'the beginning of the end' for that thing as fashion (Simmel 1971: 303).

Writing 25 years or so later than Simmel, John Flügel also relates the conditions for fashion to different forms of society in his (1950) *The Psychology of Clothes*. Flügel uses the terms 'fixed' and 'modish' clothing rather than non- or anti-fashion and fashion but, like Simmel, he uses 'certain differences of social organization' to explain the distinction (Flügel 1950: 129). More precisely, he explains the social organizations as different relations to time and space. For Flügel, fixed costume 'changes slowly in time ... but varies greatly in space' and modish costume 'changes rapidly in time ... but varies comparatively little in space' (Flügel 1950: 129-30). Non-fashion or anti-fashion changes and varies from place to place but remains largely the same over time in those places. And fashion changes quickly and a lot over time but is largely the same in many different places or 'localities' as Flügel has it. This sounds plausible. We are not surprised to see a great diversity in the clothes worn by different indigenous cultures all over the world, and we are not surprised that they are 'still the same years later. And we are used to finding much the same fashionable items in the shops whether we go to New York, London or Brisbane, and we are not surprised when those fashions are different a few months later. It should be noted at this point that the 'we' referred to in the last two sentences is not innocent: this 'we' is modern and Western and it is precisely the fashionable 'we' that is characterizing the dress of the other as non-Western and non-modern anti-fashion.

Fixed costume or anti-fashion varies in space (is different in different places) because it is identified with a specific local or indigenous culture and the place that it inhabits. Anti-fashion or fixed costume, on Flügel's account, is more likely to be encountered 'outside the sphere of western influence' and because of this it is relatively unchanging in time. Flügel says that as fixed, 'its whole value depends ... upon its permanence' (Flügel 1950: 129). Fashion or modish costume 'predominates in the western world' and does not change much from place to place; as noted, the same items and looks are found in North America, Europe and Australasia. Flügel's account supports the idea that fashion is a Western and a modern phenomenon and that a test of a society's modernity and Western-ness

would be to see whether and to what extent that society had fashion or not. These matters underlie the various debates making up and surrounding the definition and relations between the local and the global, which will be discussed in Chapter 11. It should be clear, however, that the difference between what is fashion and what is not fashion is produced by different societies' conceptions and experiences of time and space. The ways in which these different societies, fashion and anti-fashion relate to notions of the global and the local will be explored in Chapter 11.

We can now examine Polhemus and Procter's account of fashion and anti-fashion, which begins from Flügel's account of fixed and modish costume and takes in Evans-Pritchard's anthropological account of time (Polhemus 2011: 29, 31). Where Simmel and Flügel wrote of savages and primitives wearing fixed modes of costume, Polhemus and Procter write of Queen Elizabeth II's use of 'traditional' forms of dress. Where Simmel and Flügel write of civilized classes wearing modish fashions, Polhemus and Procter write of Dior's 1953 'Tulip-line' dress. Each dress is explained by being related to different cultural conceptions of time, as well as by the wearers' different relations to the social structures of which they are part.

The nature and function of fashion and anti-fashion can be understood by considering Queen Elizabeth II's 1953 coronation gown. This gown is 'traditional', 'fixed' and 'anti-fashion' and it functions as a 'symbol' of continuity. It functions as a symbol of the continuity of the British monarchy (Polhemus 2011: 30). In standing for, and representing, the continuity of the British royal family and of the institution of monarchy, the gown makes possible and reproduces the position of that family in, and as, that institution: it has the ideological function of making a historical contingency appear to be natural and, therefore, tolerable (see Chapter 5, for more on this). The 'Tulip-line' dress is quite different: it functions as a 'symbol of change, progress and movement through time' (Polhemus 2011: 31). In standing for, and representing, change, it enables the women wearing it to identify themselves as fashionable, interested in the novel and welcoming the different. It thus has the ideological function of challenging tradition, of contesting the status quo and the continued existence of old structures and practices.

The gown and accessories worn by the Queen for her formal engagements in 1953 are not much different from those she may be seen wearing in 1952, 1954, 1955 and so on, until the present. They usually involve a white or cream satin/silk gown, crown/tiara, gloves and a sash bearing the arms of the Order of the Garter. Although Polhemus does not consider the more informal clothing worn by the Queen, it could be argued that this is also anti-fashion. It commonly consists in plain, unadorned skirt, under a plain, unadorned coat, with matching hat and white gloves. The colours are invariably pastels and the same colour is carried throughout the

ensemble. It is very difficult to tell what year or even what decade the photograph has been taken in by attending only to what is being worn. Even a cursory glance at the history of 1950s' fashion indicates that women's frocks were changing rapidly, even within the same year. Dior's own 'New Look' of 1947 was succeeded by his 'Princess-line' of 1951. 1953's 'Tulip line' gave way to the 'H' line of 1954, which was in turn rendered unfashionable by the 'A' and 'Y' lines of 1955. It is neither original nor controversial to point out that constant and incessant change is what fashion is: what is worn in one year is invariably quite different from what is worn in other years.

According to Polhemus and Procter, different conceptions of, and relations to, time are at the root of this explanation. They cite the work of Evans-Pritchard to make the point that conceptions of time 'reflect and express' a culture's 'patterns of social organization'; these conceptions mirror what members of a culture think are the correct and proper ways of relating to each other (Polhemus 2011: 31). Traditional anti-fashion is a 'model of time as continuity . . . [and] the maintenance of a status quo'. As a result, it is entirely 'rational' that the Queen should wear a gown that represents 'timelessness and changelessness' (Polhemus 2011: 32). Someone who desires upward social mobility, a 'social climber' who desires an improvement in their own social status, perhaps, will wear clothes that reflect a conception of time as 'change and progress'. The fashions worn by such a social climber will 'advertise . . . socio-temporal mobility'. Therefore, the desire for an improvement in one's social status depends, or makes sense, on the basis of a conception of time as change (Polhemus 2011: 32–3). This is why the 'Tulip-line' dress and every other fashion item that has ever existed is a challenge and a contestation of the *status quo*. The *status quo* is things staying as they are: fashion is change. Therefore, a fashionable frock does not only symbolize or represent change and difference. It is the embodiment of difference, change and of things not staying the way they are. Fashion, then, requires and reflects an experience and a conception of time as change and difference.

As monarch, a queen has no interest in symbolizing, let alone being an agent of, discontinuity and change. However, this idea does not prevent the tiresomely regular attempts of newspaper fashion journalists to suggest otherwise. The present British Queen and her son, the future British King, are routinely proposed as 'fashion icons' in even the more left-leaning British press. In September 2012, for example, the British Style Award contest, which is sponsored by the British Fashion Council, included HM the Queen, HRH the Prince of Wales and HRH the Duchess of Cambridge in the list of nominees. And in the summer of 2012, both *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* newspapers ran articles asking whether Prince Charles is a 'fashion icon'. To his credit, Prince Charles appears to understand his predicament far

better than the fashion journalists and he is reported to have 'poo-pooed' the idea that he is a fashion icon (Leitch 2012). The Duchess of Cambridge is a more problematic figure. In the UK, journalists are unsure whether to ask whether she is a 'style icon' or a 'fashion icon': *The Telegraph* going for the former and the BBC going for the latter while simultaneously fudging the issue and calling her style 'classic' (*The Telegraph* 2011 and BBC 2011; see Chapters 5 and 12 for more on the ideological function of the 'classic'). It seems fair to say that she wears acceptably bland and conservative styles produced by appropriately high-status but not too expensive designer labels. According to the arguments proposed here, however, neither she nor any of the other members of the royal family wear fashion.

Fashion as prosthesis

The idea of fashion as prosthesis may seem odd. However, if we are happy to think about fashion and clothing as having functions, then we should not be squeamish about calling fashion and clothing prosthetics. The sections above on whether fashion is art or design used the notion of function to show that art could not be distinguished from design on the basis of one having functions and the other not. We are, therefore, happy to think about fashion and clothing as having, and performing, a variety of functions. To think about clothing and fashion as having, and performing, functions, whether they be to keep our bodies warm and dry or to construct a social and cultural identity, is to think of them as tools, as things we use to accomplish some task or other. The task may be communication, identity creation, looking nice or keeping us dry, but the clothes have functions and to that extent they are tools. As tools, they are prostheses: something that is not us but which we add to ourselves and without which we would consider ourselves incomplete. Strictly, clothing and fashion are no different in this respect from both our bodies and language. Neither our bodies nor language are us but we use them to represent ourselves to other people. I am not my hair, fingernails or limbs, and I am not the English language, but I use all of them to represent myself to other people. What I think of, and experience, as myself is not available to anyone, including myself, except as representation in, and through, tools such as language. My body and the language I use are prosthetics, therefore, which are not me and which I need to learn to use but without which I would hardly be (me) at all.

This conception of fashion as prosthesis must be distinguished from those approaches to prosthesis that conceive it as a progressive or increasing integration of machines and non-human parts into bodies. This conception presents prosthesis as an extension or enhancement of the properties and capabilities of that body (see the essays in Smith and Morra

2006, for example). The conception that is being proposed here presents the body itself as already prosthetic. Consequently, the properties and capabilities of the body are not being enhanced or improved, they are made possible as, and by, prosthesis. It is the prosthetic that makes us possible as bodies. This is because there is no non-cultural definition or experience of the body 'proper'. Any definition of the body must be the product of cultural values and beliefs: in one culture a proper body will be thin and pale; in another it will be tanned and muscular. There is no right and wrong to be discovered; there are only different cultural ideals, which vary from culture to culture. Similarly, the terms one uses to describe one's experience of the body will always come from some pre-existing language, reproducing the values and beliefs of the culture that speaks and thinks the language. If there is no natural and non-cultural definition or experience, then all such definition and experience must be cultural and if it is cultural, then it must be learned, or added. As something that is added, it is what is commonly understood as prosthetic. If the prosthetic is necessary for any experience and understanding of the body, then the prosthetic cannot be an enhancing, augmentation or extension of the body: it is what makes the body possible 'in the first place'.

Therefore, fashion and clothing should not be conceived as simple enhancements, augmentations or extensions of ourselves: they are also what make our experience, and ourselves, possible. This means that any notion of fashion and clothing as decoration must be handled very carefully. It is not that there is a body that is then decorated; strictly, it is the 'decoration' that makes the body possible, and fashion and clothing are just some of the ways in which that can happen. There is no pertinent analytic difference between a body that is tanned and muscular and a body that is dressed in a short skirt. Neither is 'the body proper' and both involve the use of prosthetic tools, the result of cultural decisions made regarding how to fashionably adorn a body. The muscles and the skirt are the same kind of prosthetic tool, there is no natural level of musculature and there is no natural shortness of skirts; both are tools selected for their function, their fashionableness or otherwise.

This conception of prosthesis and of fashion as prosthesis will be developed in terms of sign and communication in Chapter 6 and in terms of the body in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated what fashion is and is not. Whether fashion is art or not and whether fashion is design or not has been discussed and it has been argued that fashion is not art. Indeed, on the account presented

here, a lot of what is called 'art' is not art. Rather, fashion was seen to be design; the presence and role of function was seen to be decisive. The relative anonymity of design, including fashion design, was also proposed as a slightly less fundamental reason why fashion is design and not art. Anti-fashion, originating from some anthropological discussions that may be quite shocking to modern minds, concerning 'primitive' and 'savage' 'races', was also covered. Different conceptions of time and space were seen to structure the responses to fashion of some social and economic groups in even the most apparently modern societies, however. Finally, the way in which a conception of fashion as design obliged us to think of fashion as prosthetic and to understand even 'the body' as a product of prosthesis, of 'add-ons', was explored. Having established fashion and clothing as prostheses and tools, the following chapter will investigate what fashion and clothing do.

Further reading

- Arnold, R. (2009) *Fashion: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Davis, F. (1992) *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press; chapter 8 on anti-fashion.
- <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/prosthesis/>; last accessed November 2013.
- Jain, S. (1999) 'The Prosthetic Imagination: Enabling and Disabling the Prosthesis Trope', *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 24, 1, Winter: 33–54.
- Pappas, N. (2010) 'The Naked Truth of Antifashion Philosophy', in Scapp, R. and Seitz, B. (eds) *Fashion Statements*, New York, Palgrave.

chapter 4

What fashion and clothing do

Introduction

The previous chapter used the idea of function to distinguish art and design, and considered the argument that fashion is design because it has a function or a series of functions. This chapter will begin to identify and explain those functions; the chapter will analyse what it is that fashion and clothing do. We will see that many of the discussions around what fashion and clothing do have their origin in early anthropological accounts of adornment. These discussions concern the ways in which what we wear protects us from the elements, keeping us warm and dry, for example. They also refer to cultural values regarding appropriate levels of modesty and display. And they introduce the communicative functions of what we wear, the ways in which fashion and clothing are meaningful.

Fashion and clothing and function

First of all, it is worth reminding ourselves of Alice Rawsthorn's argument from the previous chapter concerning the difference between fashion and art, because it inadvertently uses the idea of function to illuminate an important difference between fashion and clothing. Rawsthorn says that 'fashion has a practical purpose, whereas art does not' (Rawsthorn 2003). There are two mistakes here. The first mistake, as we saw in the previous chapter, is that art has plenty of functions or purposes, including social,