



MARK-E0058 SOCIOLOGY OF CONSUMPTION AND FASHION

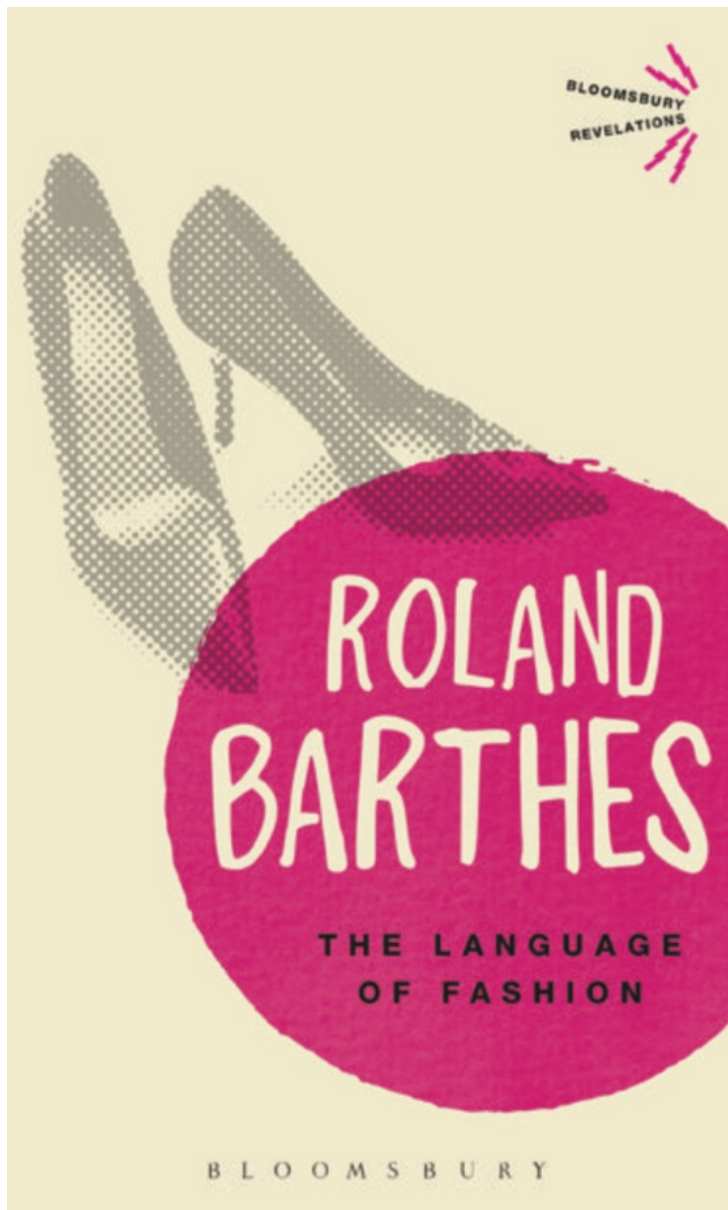
# SEMIOTICS AND FASHION

# **TODAY**

- Semiotics and fashion codes
- How fashions change (semiotically, at least)

# ***Perusal Comments:***

- Can Fashion be a language? Belk contra Barthes
  - Fashion as a language in the sense as a means/medium of communication.
    - However, not as evenly distributed as a language. (Sub-cultures, social groupings with codes that can be more or less understood in the broader culture)
- An outside of sign-value?
- Creativity contra rules



## Does clothing have a code? Empirical findings and theoretical implications in the study of clothing as a means of communication

Grant D. McCracken \*  
Victor J. ROTH \*

### Introduction

#### *The clothing–language comparison*

This paper examines the long standing suggestion that clothing has language-like properties by investigating two hypotheses: (1) clothing as a means of communication relies on a 'code', and (2) the clothing code is not uniformly known in the community that uses it. Research results are reported that confirm both of these hypotheses. These findings demonstrate that clothing communication is indeed informed by a code and that the knowledge of this code depends upon the social location of the individual and the social characteristics of the particular clothing look. The relevance of these findings for theory development in the fields of product symbolism, information processing, and attribution studies, and several product categories is noted. Finally, the paper presents a research instrument, the 'graduated photo-sort' method, that may prove useful in the future investigation of product symbolism and the communicative properties of material culture.

Clothing is recognized as a medium of communication that expresses a range of social information (see, e.g., Adams, 1973; Bogatyrev, 1971; Cordwell and Schwarz, 1979; Holman, 1979; Lauer and Lauer, 1981; Roach and Eicher, 1965; Rosenfeld and Plax, 1977; Sproles, 1985). Its expressive quality has led some to suggest that clothing resembles language (see Barthes, 1967, p. 25; Holman, 1980b; Lurie, 1981; Messing, 1960, p. 558; Nash, 1977, p. 173; Neich, 1982, p. 214; Sahlins, 1976, p. 179; Turner, 1969, p. 50). As with any good metaphor, the comparison of clothing and language encourages us to entertain unsuspected similarities. It invites us to ask which of the properties of language are also the properties of clothing. For instance, does an act of clothing communication involve the transmission of a 'message' between an 'addressor' and 'addressee' in a particular 'context' according to a particular 'code' through a particular 'contact' (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353)? Can we speak of clothing communication as having 'referential', 'emotive', 'conative', 'poetic', 'pathic', and 'metalingual' functions (Jakobson, 1960, p. 357)? These are some of the questions that the metaphor brings to light. The present paper examines only one of them. It reports research undertaken to help determine whether clothing, like

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# Perusall comments: Barthes

“Much like everyone else in this thread, indeed it comes as a mild shock to realise that there are codes and we are not as free as we would like to think.”

“I really can't decide whether I think fashion should have rules or not”

Image vs written text

# Perusall comments: McCracken and Roth

- Picture quality: It's shit I know.
- *“I wonder if the results would have been different in the 2020s.”*
  - You can see the age of the article in how it discusses fashion, gender and sex.
- *“To me it seems there is a fine line between a code and a stereotype/marketplace myth”*
  - We will note this tension between fashion codes, stereotypes and marketplace. In short the marketplace tends to feed off marginalised, avant gard movements, subcultures/underground cultures and other forms of movements that goes against, critiques or distances itself from a “mainstream” culture. Subculture/Underground fashion codes → Popularisation --> Commodification → Repeat
- *“this article was published 34 years ago before social media I would assume that if this study was repeated now, these individuals' access to the code information in this article would have increased dramatically due to social media.”*

# Some Perusall Tips

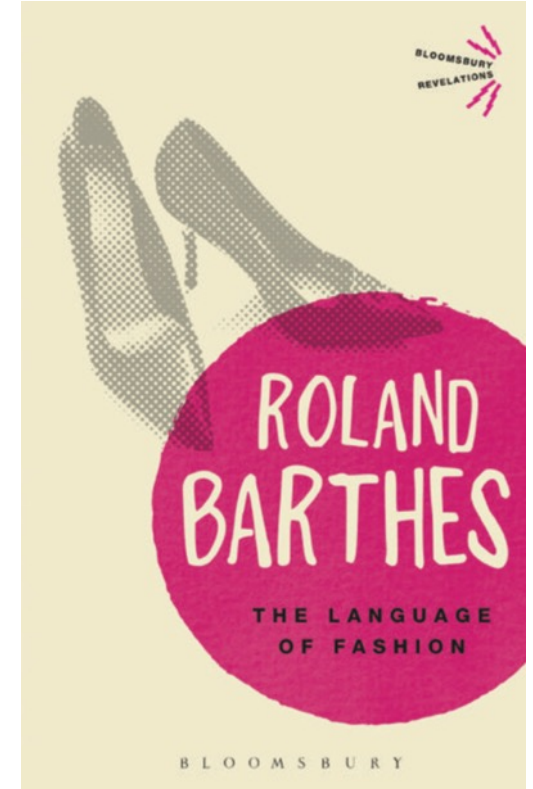
- Open the article early
- Try to split the readings into intervals.
  - Since Perusall heavily favours interaction, which is easier if not all comments arrive right before class.
- If you like reading articles on paper, do so but have it open on Perusall too.
- Remember to look at the Introduction lecture slide for how to get maximum perusall score!!

Is there a clothing code in the business school? Yes/No?  
If Yes, What does it compose of?

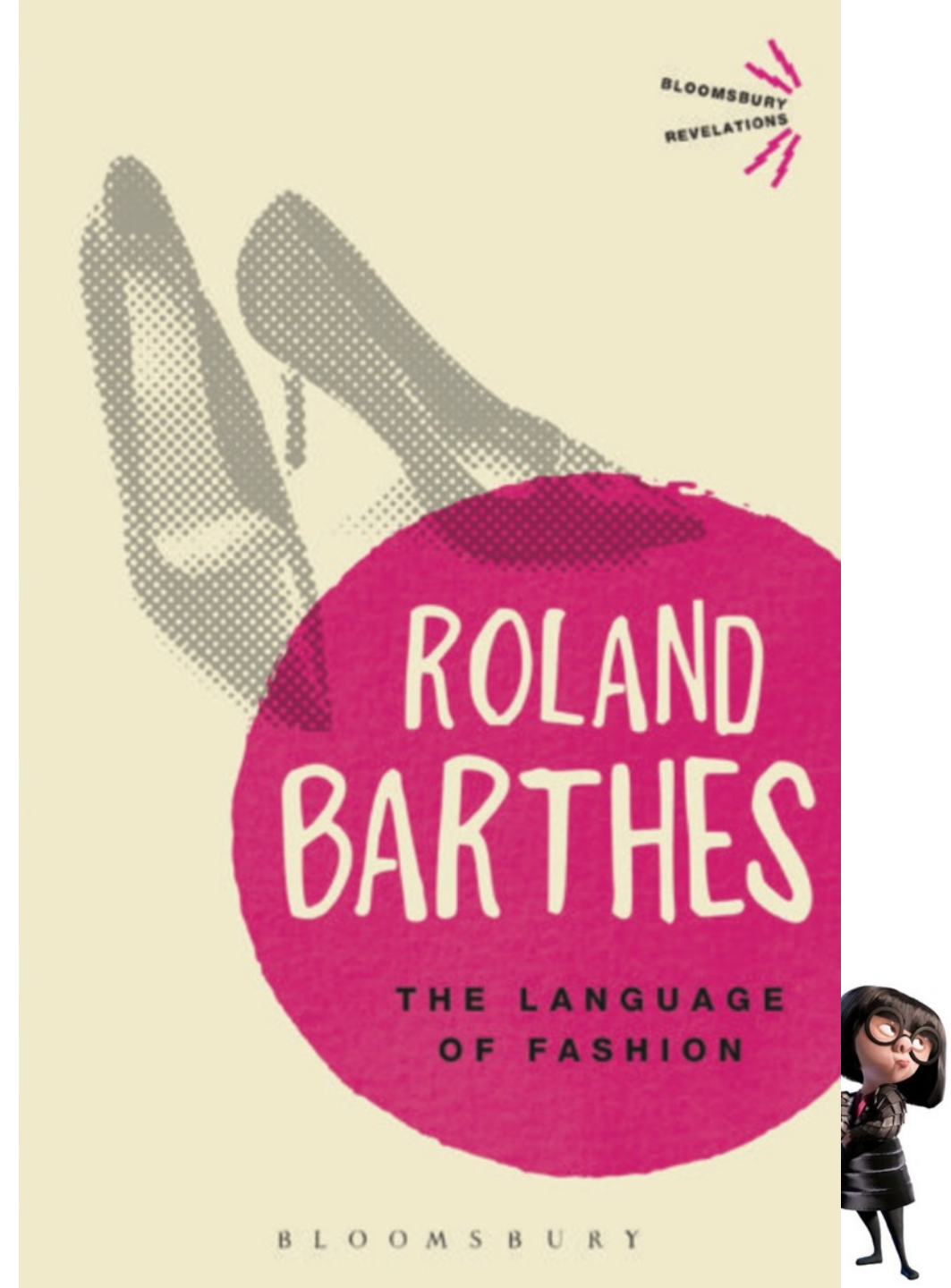
What about marketing, Art, finance or philosophy  
majors?



What is “the fashion system”?

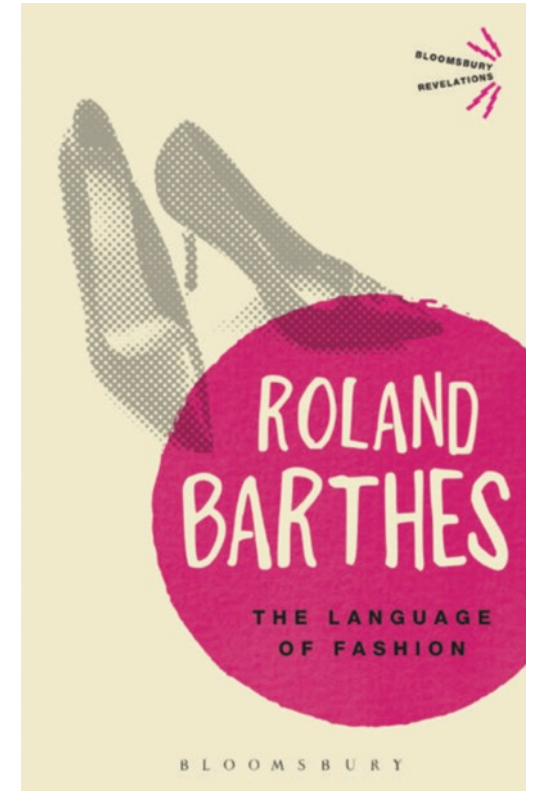


The sort of public opinion maintained and promoted by the press and its letters pages etc. presents fashion as an essentially capricious phenomenon, based on the creative faculty of the designer. **According to public opinion, fashion is still located within a mythology of unfettered creativity that enables it to evade both the systematic and the habitual, resting upon a rather romantic notion of an inexhaustible abundance of spontaneous creativity.** Isn't it said that fashion designers can do anything with nothing?



**FG:** *What image of fashion have you kept from your analysis?*

**RB:** The title of my book, *The Fashion System*, is pure provocation. **For me fashion is indeed a system.** Contrary to the myth of improvisation, of caprice, of fantasy, of free creativity, **we can see that fashion is strongly coded.** It is ruled by combination in which there is a finite reserve of elements and certain rules of change. The whole set of fashion features for each year is found in the collection of features which has its own rules and limits, like grammar. These are purely formal rules. For example, there are some elements of clothing that can be put together, but others which are not allowed. **If fashion appears to us to be unpredictable this is because we are using only a small human memory. As soon as we widen it to its historical dimension we find a very marked regularity.**



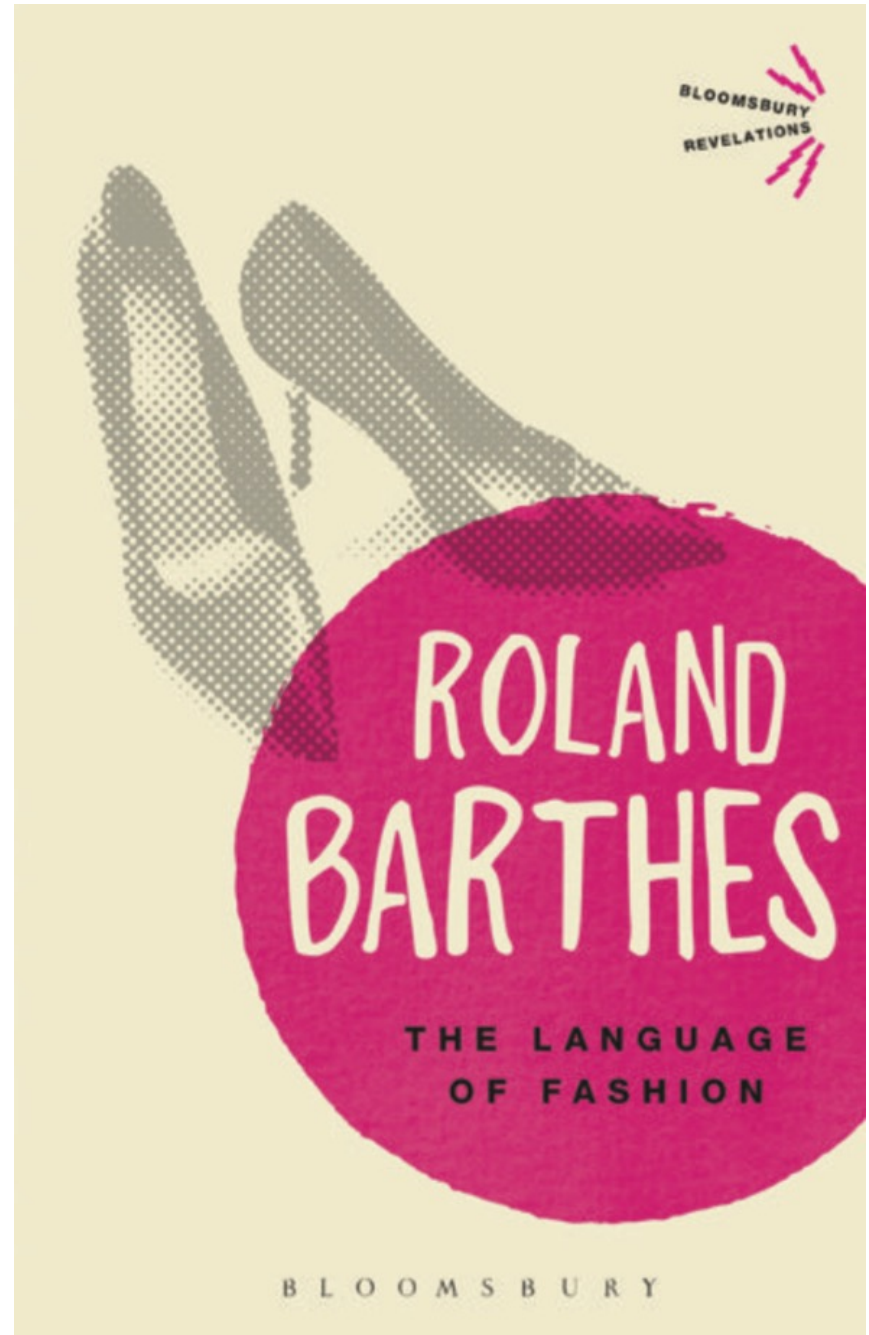
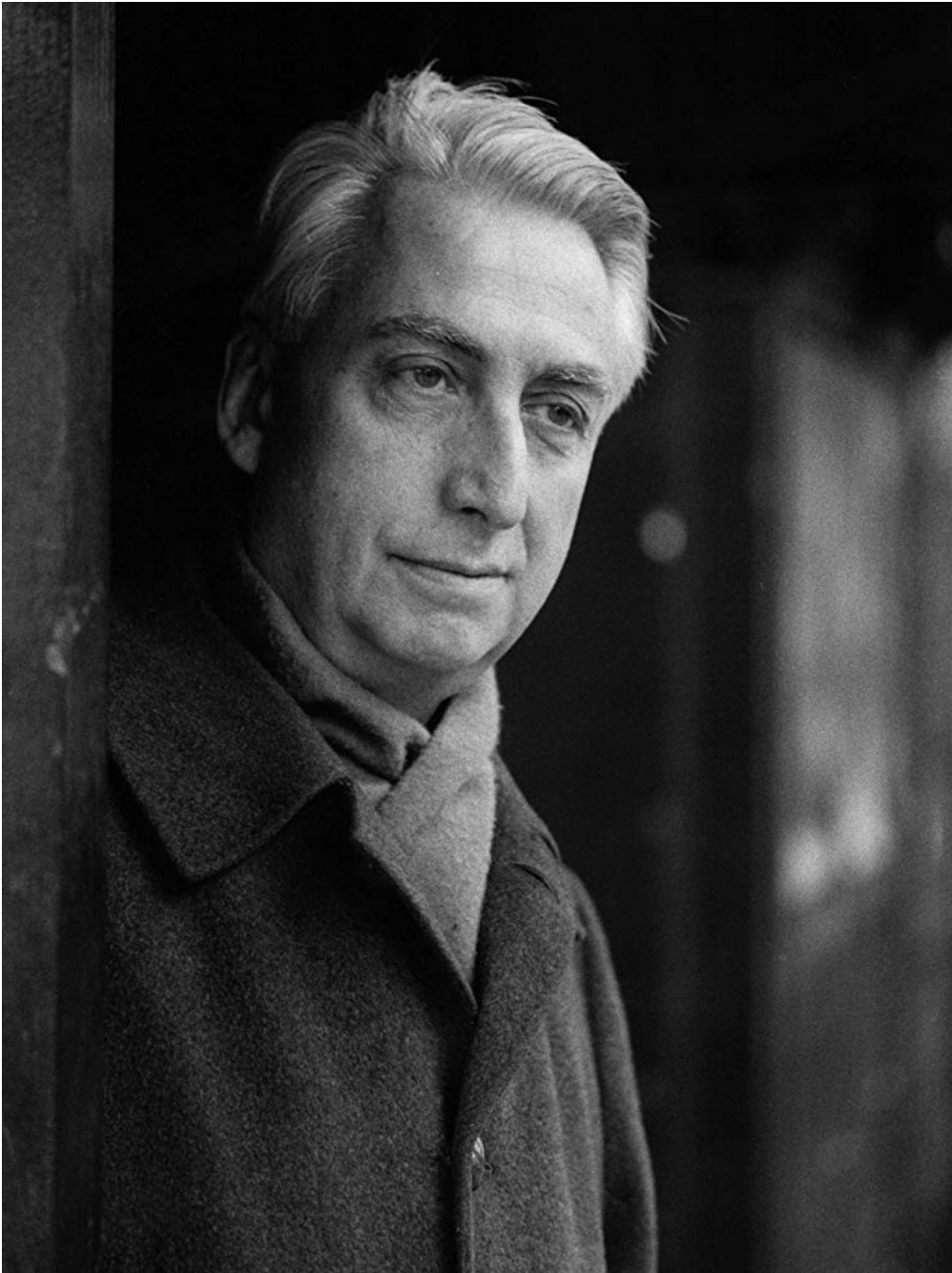
The word of the  
day is “code”



# ***SEMIOTICS***

Understanding  
fashion as a  
language







# ***WHAT IS SEMIOTICS?***

Semiotics is primarily concerned with the investigation of **meaning**, that is, how meaning is **created, transmitted** and **interpreted** in various situations.

Analysis of **systems of signs**.

# ***WHAT IS SEMIOTICS?***

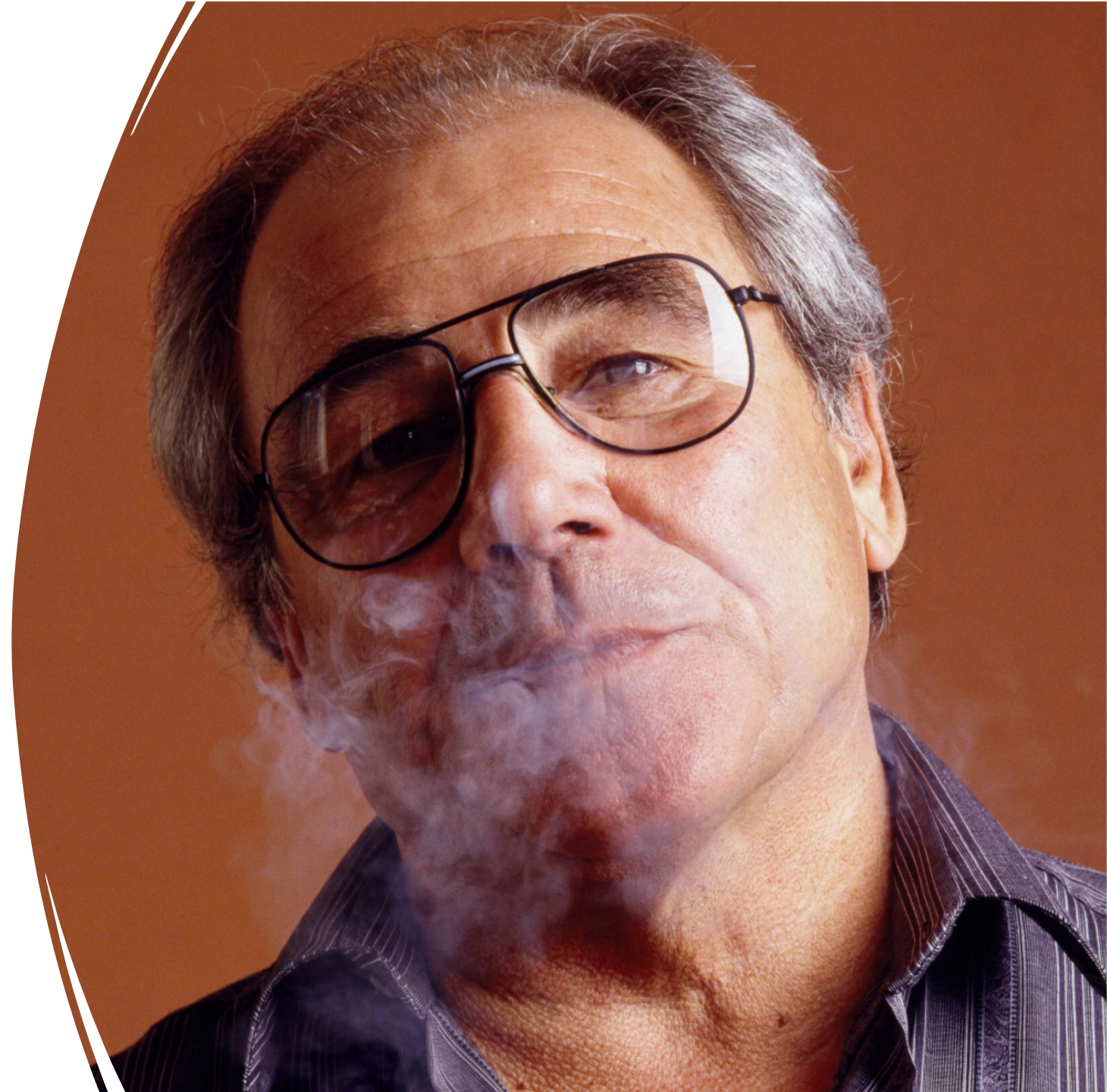
Man has dressed himself in order to carry out a signifying activity. The wearing of clothing is fundamentally an act of **meaning** that goes beyond modesty, ornamentation and protection. It is an act of **signification** and therefore a profoundly social act.  
(Barthes)

Clothing concerns all of the human person, all of the body ... as well as the relationships of the body to society.

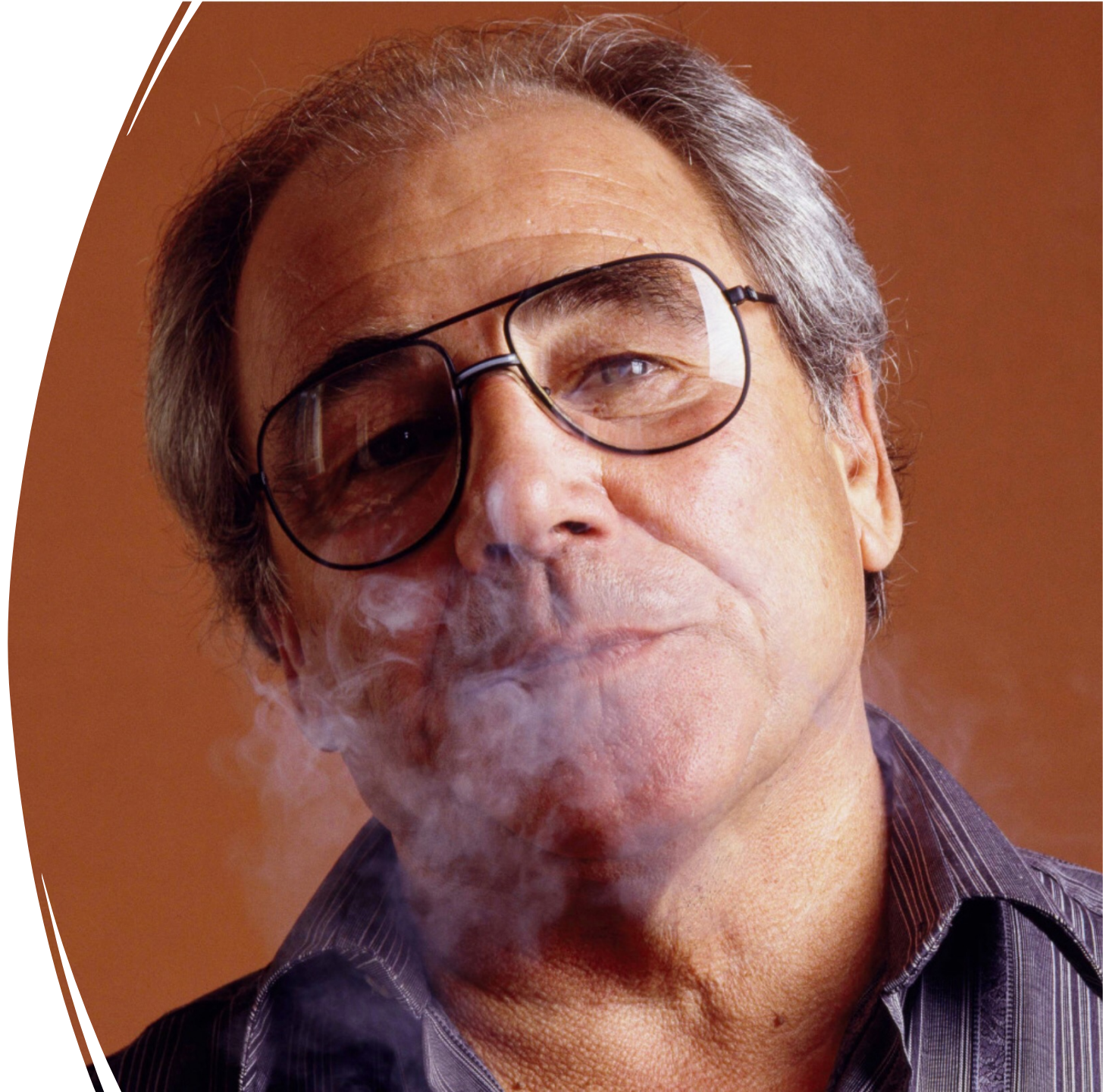
# Baudrillard rears his head

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- We have to (in society) dress and are thus forced to signify in relation to the social
- There is **no outside** this code of signs
- Thus we invest our body with **sign value** that receives value from its (relational) difference to other signs.
- Functionality (use-value) becomes just another sign, an alibi for sign-value.
- Freedom = to choose from a set of signs from or in relation the marketplace and fashion.







# WHAT IS SEMIOTICS?

The **signifier** is the idea or the concept that is attached to a particular thing, which is the **signified**.

(The designation of skirt as “fashionable” is the **signifier**, and the thing itself (the skirt) is the **signified**.)

Yet! The skirt has no intrinsic or essential meaning without the signifier (from a semiotic perspective)!

The sign is the combination of the signifier and the signified, and the **sign system** is the larger historical system that places the meaning of the sign within a chain of signs, or in relation to other signs, current and past.



“For instance, one sign might be “mom jeans.” The **signified** would be the object itself –the actual, material thing–and the **signifier** is the “next” order of meaning-making. The phrase “mom jeans” is a signifier inasmuch as it mediates our understanding of the object through a word or phrase (or an image). But the signifier also includes the operations of meanings through which “mom jeans” comes to function not just as a **denotative** name for high-waisted, pleated, “relaxed seat” denim pants, but also as a **connotative** sign referring to a whole host of ideas about mothers (whether or not a person wearing them is a mother, or whether or not a particular mother wears them, why would a mother be wearing them) and their location in the fashion system.”







**Important:** the relationship between the two components of signs, signifiers and signifieds, is arbitrary and based on convention.

This means that meaning of signs can change—often rapidly!

**Denotation**

**Connotation**



# **Discuss!**

Please give recent examples of clothing items or brands acquiring new symbolic meaning—especially in a contested manner

# ***PARADIGMA AND SYNTAGMA: DIFFERENCE AND THE TWO AXES***

- **Paradigma:** a class of objects or concepts
- **Syntagma:** an element which follows another in a particular sequence
- Fashion operates in both categories, but is more powerfully articulated through syntagma!

## Paradigma

A blouse, a shirt, a –  
shirt...



## Syntagma

A blouse, a skirt,  
jeans, dress shoes...



**Always contextual at the level of practice!**

blouse + trousers + high-heeled shoes → “ok for fine dinner”

blouse + skirt + sneakers → “not ok for a fine dinner”





## WHITE TIE DRESS CODE

- 1. Black tailcoat
- 2. Black pleated pants
- 3. White waistcoat
- 4. Wing collared dress shirt
- 5. White bow tie
- 6. Mother-of-pearl studs
- 7. Mother-of-pearl cufflinks
- 8. Patent leather pumps

### OPTIONAL ACCESSORIES

- 9. Black top hat
- 10. Gold pocket watch
- 11. White leather gloves
- 12. White lapel flower
- 13. Walking stick

IF YOU WANT TO GO HIGH/LOW...

**DON'T BUY THESE**



**\$415 / \$67**

**BUY THESE**



**\$48 / \$220**

# Does clothing have a code? Empirical findings and theoretical implications in the study of clothing as a means of communication

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Victor J. Roth \*

**Introduction**

“The term ‘code’ is here defined as the knowledge that must be shared by the addressor and addressee of a clothing message in order for the former to create this message and the latter to understand it.”



*Hypothesis 1.* Clothing interpretation is informed by a code.

*Hypothesis 2.* If a code exists, the code that informs clothing interpretation **is not uniformly known**.

*Hypothesis 2a.* All members of the community possess greater knowledge of **some parts of the code** than other parts of the code.

*Hypothesis 2b.* **Some members of the community** possess greater knowledge of the entire code than other members.

*Hypothesis 2c.* Some members of the community possess greater knowledge of **one particular part of the code** than other members of the community.

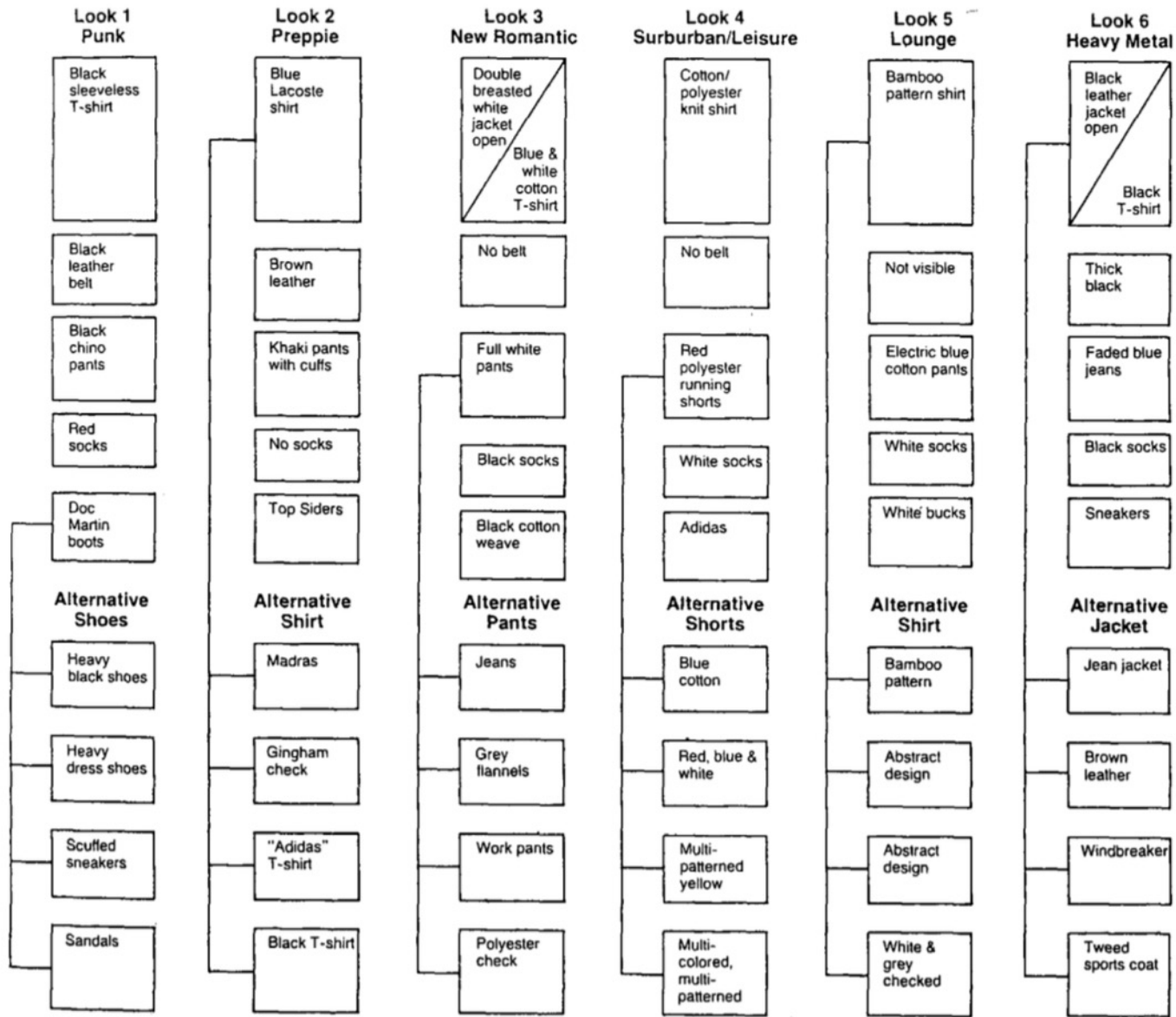
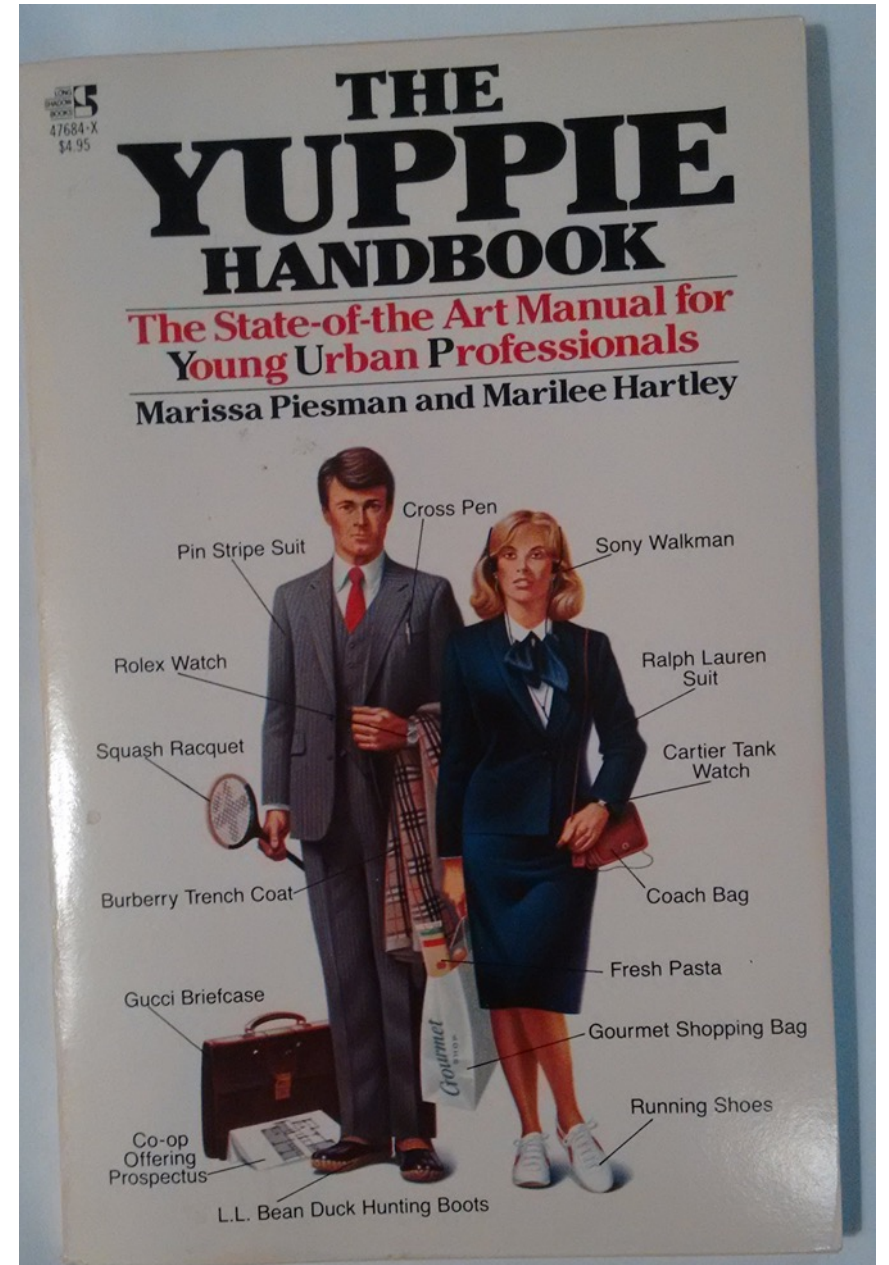


Fig. 6.



# **Discuss!**

Can you identify such  
“codes” that are  
currently not  
uniformly shared?

A blurred figure in a dark suit is walking on a runway, moving from left to right. The background shows a large, dimly lit audience of people seated in rows, watching the event. The overall atmosphere is that of a fashion show or a formal presentation.

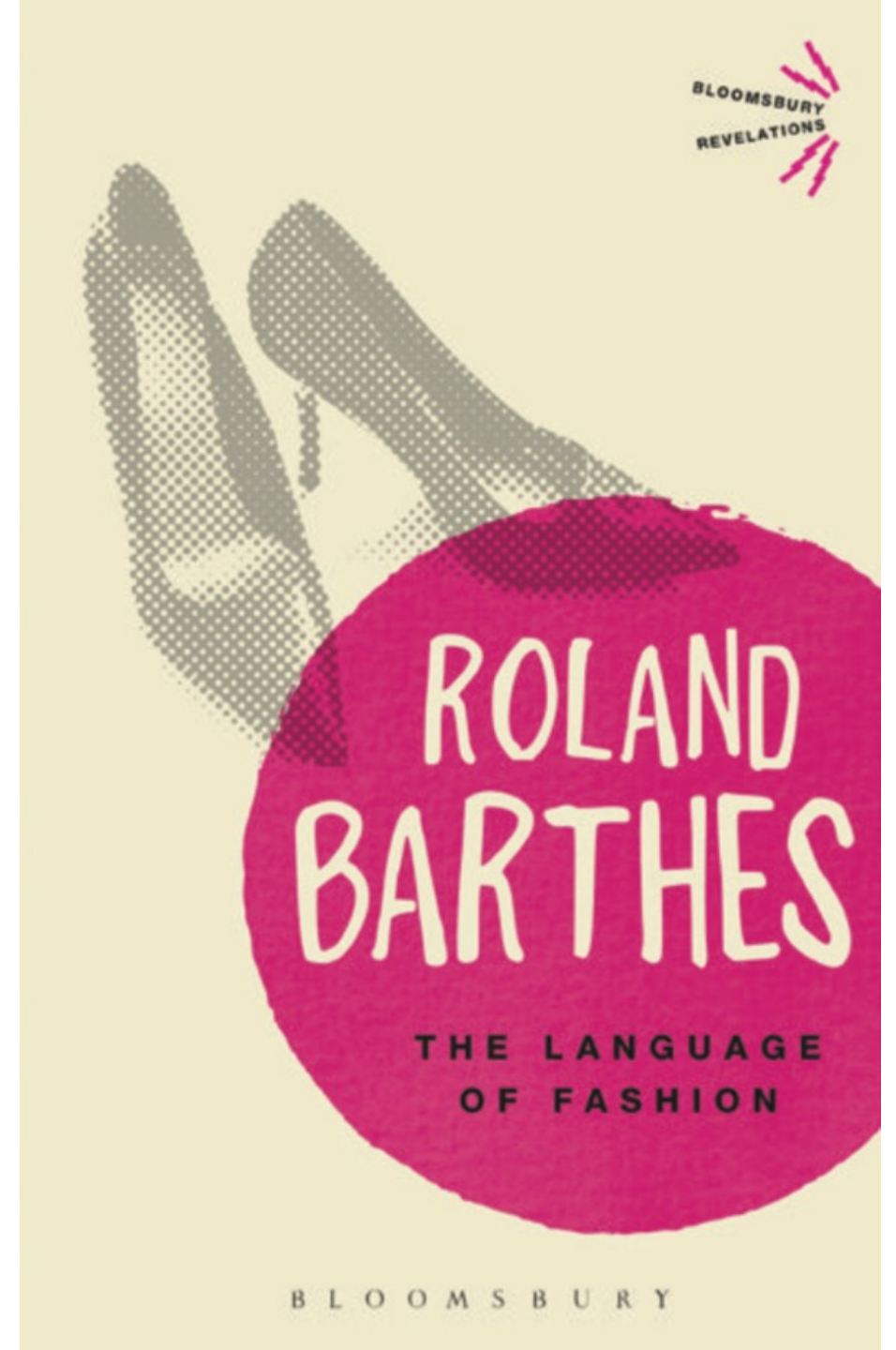
**HOW DO FASHIONS  
CHANGE?**



“Fashion consists of imitating that which has first shown itself as inimitable.”

“Every new Fashion is a refusal to inherit, a subversion against the oppression of the preceding Fashion; Fashion experiences itself as a right, the natural right of the present over the past.”

**-Barthes**



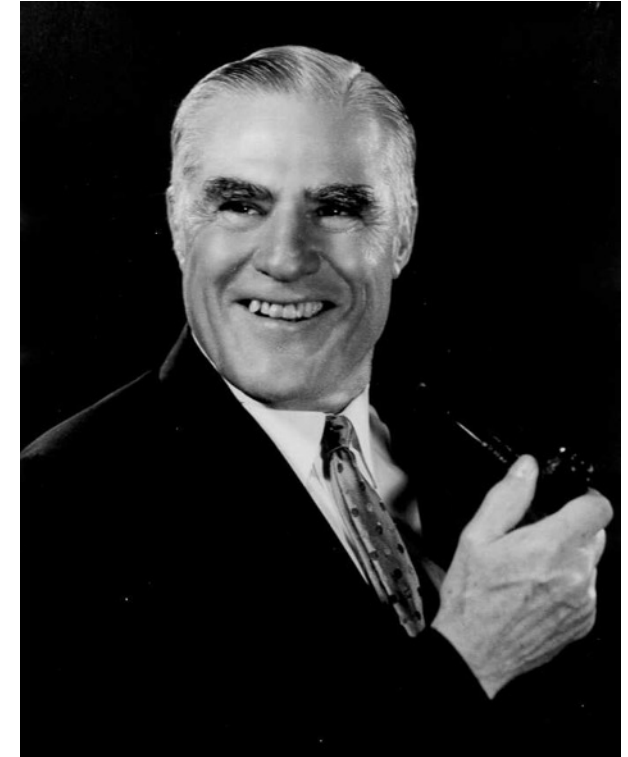
The essence of fashion consists of the fact that it should always be exercised by only part of a given group, the great majority of whom are merely on the road to adopting it.

As soon as fashion has been universally adopted, that is, as soon as anything that was originally done only by a few has really come to be practiced by all—as is the case in certain elements of clothing and various forms of social conduct—we no longer characterize it as fashion. Every growth of fashion drives it to its doom, because it thereby cancels out its distinctiveness...Fashion's question is not that of being, but rather it is simultaneously being and non-being; it always stands on the watershed of the past and the future and, as a result, conveys to us, at least while it is at its height, a stronger sense of the present than do most other phenomena.



# ***BLUMER'S RULES OF FASHION***

1. There must be freedom to choose from **competing codes**
  2. These codes are currently not axiologically or hierarchically determined
  3. Social power structures exist and contest these codes
  4. The codes must be “open” for the idea of “new” from important events, people, or other social changes
- “[Fashion has to be] open to the recurrent presentation of models or proposals of new social forms”



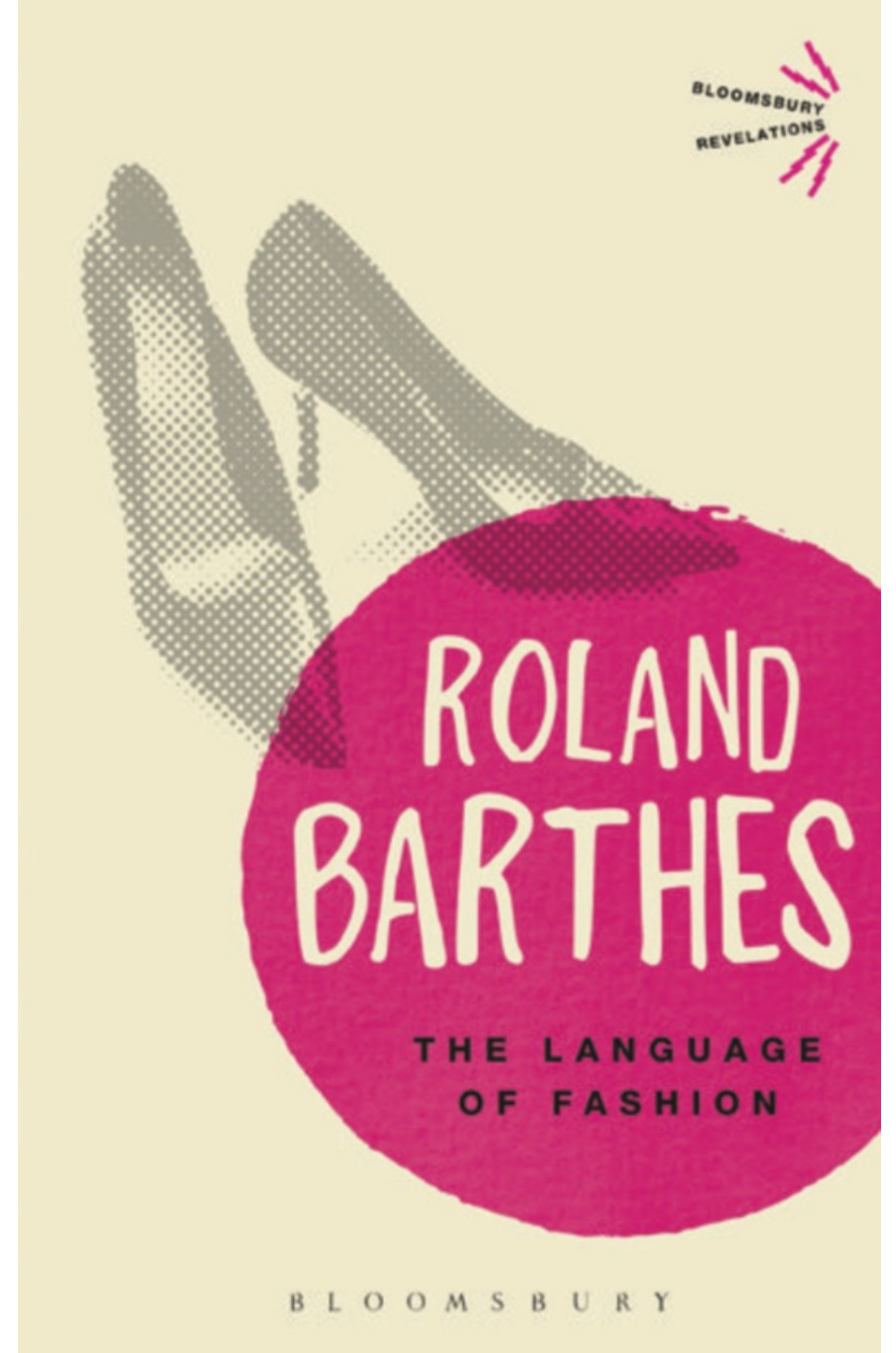


**“Fashion-able”**

=

“something can be fashioned!”

**Fashion = an open code!**



# Socks + sandals

= previously a  
“closed” code, an  
undeniable  
syntagmatic fashion  
faux pas



20 Things  
Men Should  
**NEVER** Wear

SMART CASUAL DRESS CODE FOR  
CHARITY DINNER?







INDY/LIFE



Fashion doesn't have to be complicated. But that doesn't mean it's easy

Robin Givhan | Monday 18 July 2016 13:14 | 18 comments



At the John Varvatos show, models did not wear grandpa socks with their sandals. But they were among the few.

This is a trend for spring 2017. It is not necessarily an awful trend. There is something comforting and proudly nerdish about walking around in black ankle socks and a pair of casual slides. There's charm in brightly-striped socks matched with floral-print sandals.

But it is a trend. And trends can look like affectations — especially in menswear. There is nothing worse than a guy who walks around with his polo collar popped and a tennis sweater tied around his neck or one who has his pants hanging “just so” off his hips. This may well be the footwear equivalent of fashion posturing. So really, tread carefully.

Or take a cue from Varvatos. Skip it altogether. Thursday evening he was the last designer to show his spring 2017 collection here and he squeezed

indy100 TRENDING

- Ivanka mocked for saying White House achieved 'quantum supremacy'
- Johnson fan left speechless after learning comments on LGBT+ people
- Story about man who thought that 'periods last a month' goes viral
- AOC effortlessly took down Mark Zuckerberg and everyone's obsessed

TRENDS

# Is It Time to Reconsider Men in Socks and Sandals?



BY LIANA SATENSTEIN  
January 22, 2018



Justin Bieber (left); David Beckham (right)

In the realm of men's fashion, there are some trends that are so cringe-inducing that they become grossly sexy, like shirts unbuttoned to the navel to reveal male cleavage or toothpick-thin mustaches. These so-bad-they're-good looks are an acquired taste, much like chopped liver or gefilte fish. You might hate them at first, but after some time, you learn to love them.

The same can't necessarily be said of the long detested socks-and-sandals combination. Instead of a guilty pleasure like V-necks or Burt Reynolds's thick facial hair, the look is more associated with bros

MOST POPULAR



LIVING  
The Bride Wore Alexander McQueen to Her Wedding in the English Wilderness  
BY ALEXANDRA MACON



FASHION  
The Fall Sweater Trend You Will See Everywhere This Season  
BY MADELINE FASS



LIVING  
Nordstrom Manhattan Is Here At Last! Inside the Store's Opening-Night...  
BY DANIELLE NAER



Jacques Derrida saw that there is a human fascination with the “in-between”—a desire to *create* signs that resist definite categorization

“Zombies are cinematic inscriptions of the failure of the “life/death” opposition... **It poisons systems of order, and like all undecidables, out to be returned to order.**”

**This desire for first category busting and then establishing order is a key process in fashion!**



A new fashion will initially feel like a **transgression**—almost an insult!

A code opens, it becomes contested, then it begins to close again and we move on to a new code

Fashion: “Busting a code open”



“Truly beautiful, definitely beautiful clothing would put an end to fashion.”

(Baudrillard, 1981: 79)

*Time*

*Gender*

*Practice*

*Time*

*Gender*

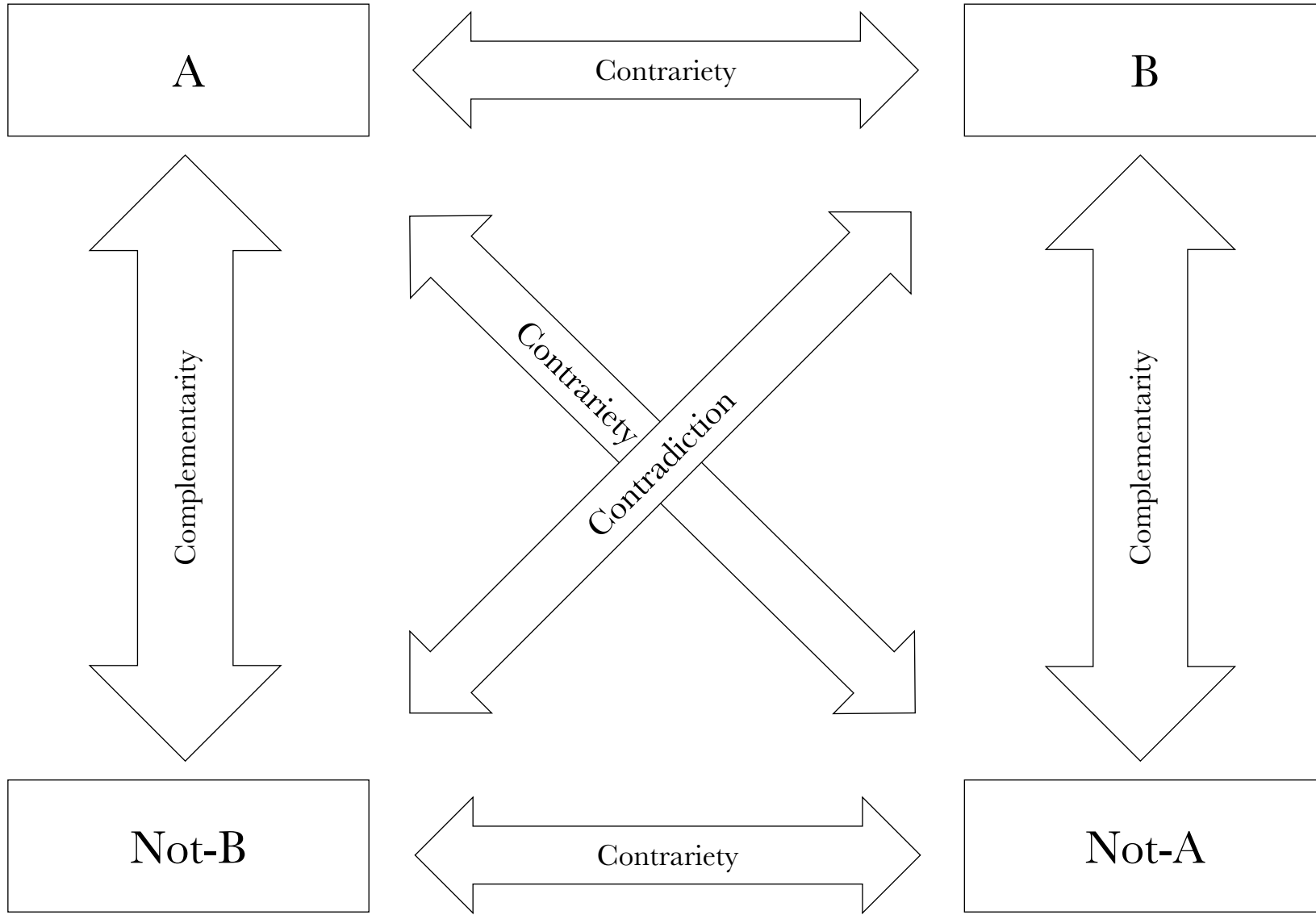
*Practice*

# **Discuss!**

What comes to mind when you hear the words “classic”, “vintage”, “avant garde”, “nostalgia”, “retro”, and “traditional”

Important! semiotics operate primarily through **difference**.

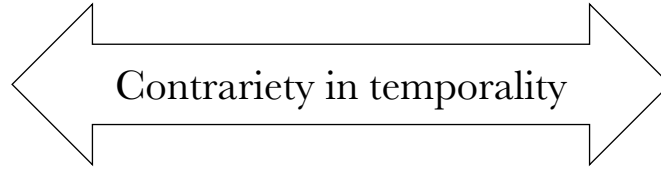
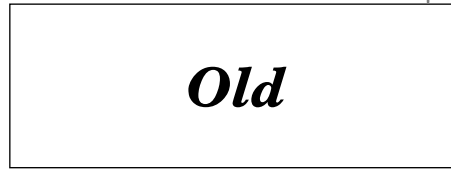
What something "is" also denotes what something is *not*.



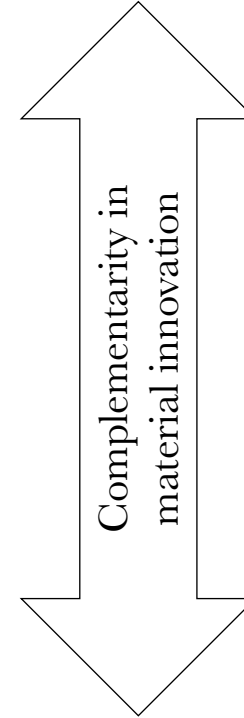
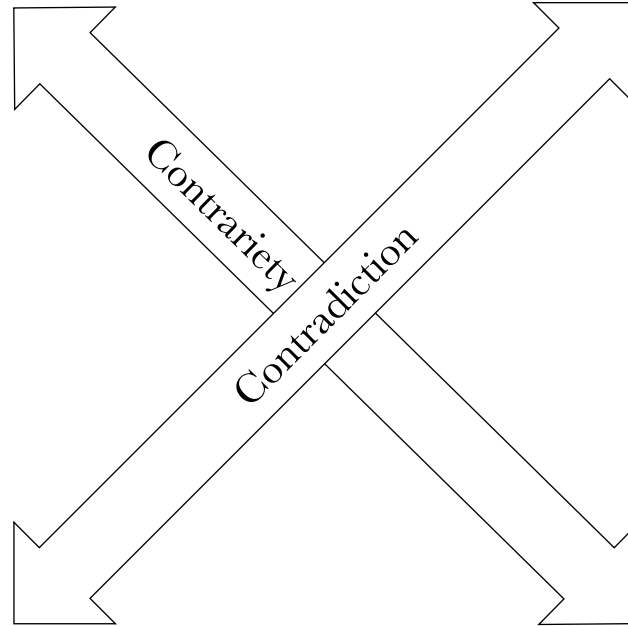


Classic

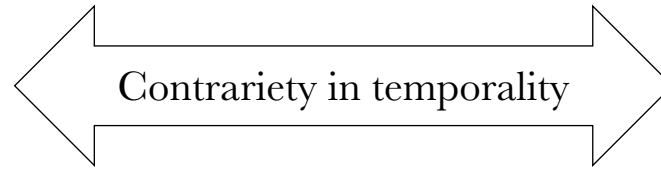
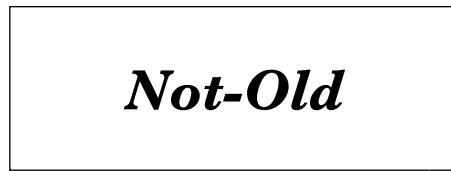
Tradition



Avant-Garde



Retro and  
Kitsch



Nostalgia

Vintage

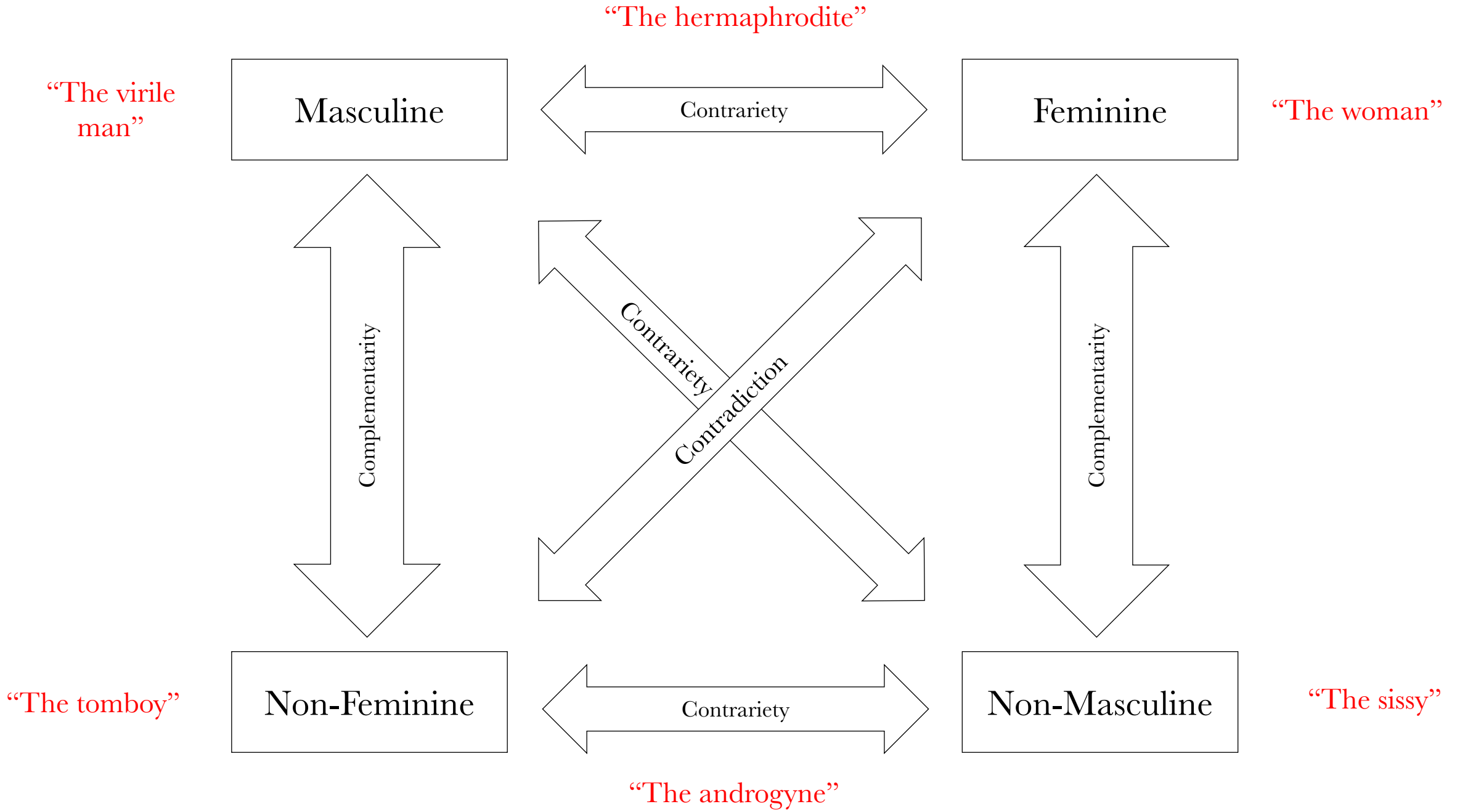
*Time*

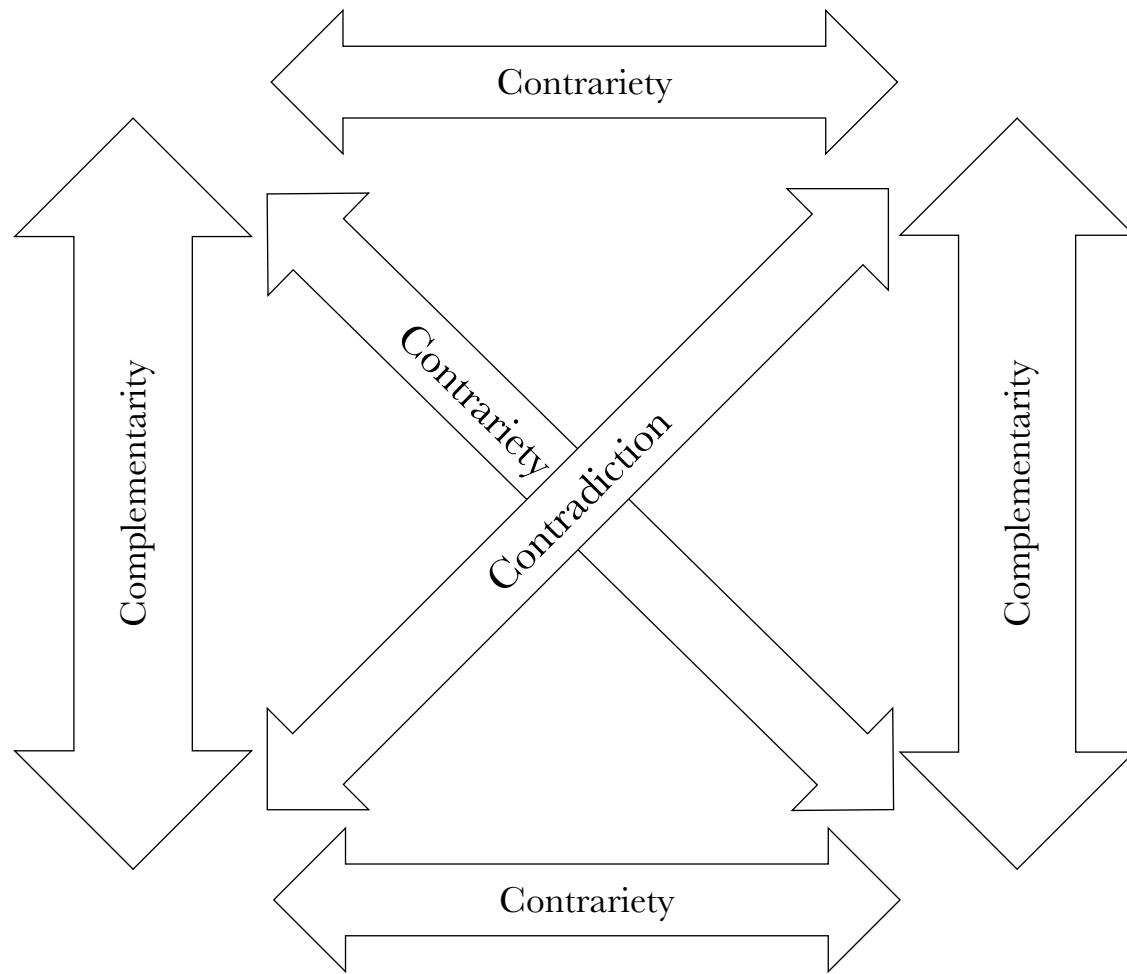
*Gender*

*Practice*

**Discuss!**

How is gender  
constructed semiotically?



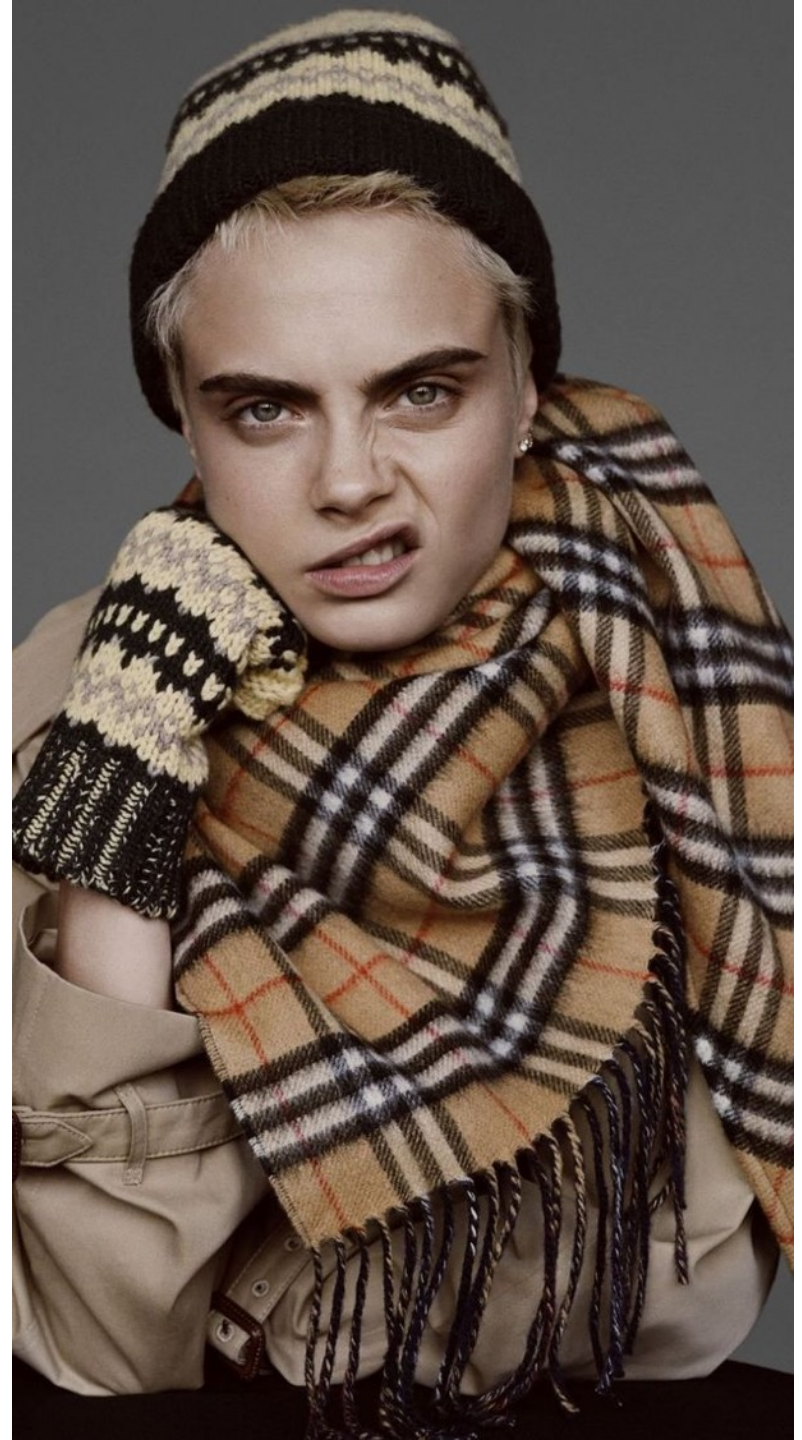








Hermaphrodite,  
androgynous, or both?



“There is no feature of clothing which is naturally feminine; all there is is a rotation, regular turn-arounds of forms” (Barthes)

Men wearing Makeup

Men Wearing pink

Paoletti, J. B. (2012). Pink and blue: Telling the girls from the boys in America. *Bloomington: Indiana UP*.

Hunt, K. A., Fate, J., & Dodds, B. (2011). Cultural and social influences on the perception of beauty: A case analysis of the cosmetics industry. *Journal of Business Case Studies (JBCS)*, 7(1).



*Time*

*Gender*

*Practice*









# LINNAN JUHLAT

## Duudsonit saivat pelkkää ylistystä puvuistaan



Duudsonit Tampere-talossa sisällä. (KUVA: ANTTI HÄMÄLÄINEN)

Julkaistu: 7.12.2013 0:04



Jaa



Twiittaa



Sähköposti

**Pohjanmaan pojat ovat saaneet pelkkää ylistystä itsenäisyysjuhlan puvuistaan.**

IS:n lukijat ihastuivat Duudsonien pohjanmaalaiseen juhlatyyliin. Komeat miehet olivat uskollisia juurilleen ja kyllä kannatti.

- Duudsonit on ihan älyttömän seksikkäitä, hehkuttaa woouw-nimimerkki Ilta-Sanomien verkkosivuilla.



# How to Wear Joggers to Work



START SLIDESHOW →



Cut from cozy cottons and luxe cashmeres, sweatpants are probably the most comfortable piece of clothing out there. I mean, there is a reason why some of us prefer staying in bed all day to getting dressed up—it's not just laziness, it's the thought and effort that is required in putting your best foot forward.

But what if you could wear said sweatpants out and about? No, we are not talking about your oversize eighth-grade gray joggers that you wore to gym class, but pants that are just as comfortable and yet, chic enough to wear to work. When washed in the right colors and accented with interesting details, you can absolutely wear joggers 9 to 5. Ahead, we break down what to look for if you're going to wear sweatpants to the office.

[RELATED: How to Wear a Cardigan Like Kendall Jenner, Amal Clooney, and More](#)

START SLIDESHOW

## How to Get Away With Wearing Joggers to the Office

Libby MacCarthy · May 20, 2015

On days when you just *can't even*, putting together an on-point outfit for the office is a serious struggle. Even *after* coffee. And while those comfy **PJ pants** are looking pretty prime, no matter how you style your flannel bottoms they just aren't going to fly at the office. Luckily, there's an equally appealing piece that you need to get into your rotation STAT. Joggers, the cooler cousin of sweatpants, are about to change everything you thought you knew about business casual. Just follow these six quick tips and you'll be racking up style points left and right.



# Constructing Lumbersexuality: Marketing an Emergent Masculine Taste Regime

Mark A. Rademacher<sup>1</sup> and  
Casey R. Kelly<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This article examines the online retailer Huckberry.com as a singular, centralized authority responsible for marketing “lumbersexuality” as an emergent, gender-normative taste regime. As an evolution of the devalued hipster marketplace myth, analysis reveals Huckberry promotes an adaptable taste regime to its young, educated, urban, White male clientele that unites goods, meanings, and practices across multiple fields of consumption that reconnect indie consumption and taste with a fantasy of “authentic” masculinity. We argue that Huckberry offers men semiotic resources that merge the urban with the outdoors in a way that enables the enactment of a fraught though seemingly durable masculine identity project that weaves the extraordinary and mythological into the quotidian. Implications of this gendered taste regime are discussed in relationship to the ways in which lumbersexuality is mobilized as a more authentically masculine alternative to the ironic stance of hipsterism and the supposed phoniness of mass culture.

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