MARK-E0058 SOCIOLOGY OF CONSUMPTION AND FASHION

FASHION IN CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER CULTURE

SCHEDULE

LECTURE 1: Tuesday 10.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Course Introduction and Practicalities

LECTURE 2: Thursday 12.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Fashion in Consumer Culture

LECTURE 3: Tuesday 17.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

The Fashion System & Semiotics in Fashion

LECTURE 4: Thursday 19.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Guest Lecture – Petra Paasonen: Fashion, Body and Gender

LECTURE 5: Tuesday 24.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Guest Lecture – Joel Hietanen: Authenticity and Fashion

LECTURE 6: Thursday 26.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Guest Lecture – Linda Turunen: Buying, Using & Disposing of Fashion

LECTURE 7: Tuesday 31.01.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Consumers as Groups: Demographics, Subcultures, and Consumption Communities in Fashion

LECTURE 8: Thursday 02.02.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Changing Spaces in Fashion

LECTURE 9: Tuesday 07.02.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Fashion in a Digital Consumer Culture

LECTURE 10: Thursday 09.02.2023 at 14:15-16:00

Fashion at the end of the world. CANCELLED
(Group work time + extra chance for Perusall activity points)

LECTURE 11: Tuesday 14.02.2023 at 14:15-16:00
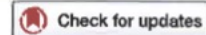**LECTURE 12: Thursday 16.02.2023 at 14:15-16.00**

Group presentations & comments

AGENDA

- Situating fashion into contemporary consumer culture
- Consumers and fashion
- Style, fashion, and identity

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

On standing out and fitting in

Russell Belk (iD)

Schulich School of Business, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

ABSTRACT

Two basic sociological processes with particular relevance to global fashion marketing and consumption are attempting to stand out or to fit in. These processes operate not only among face-to-face peers but online as well. And in some cases, users of social media, as well as marketers, are able to take advantage of the dynamics between those attempting to stand out and those attempting to fit in. In this note, I analyze various ways in which these dynamics operate as well as some of the cultural differences in the tendency toward each trait. I conclude that across cultures the interplay of standing out and fitting in is a basic engine of the fashion process.

Article

Fashion, functionality, and the contemporary consumer

Nebahat Tokatli
The New School, USA

Abstract

Uniqlo has recently been challenging the paradigm behind the phenomenal success of *Zara*: while *Zara* has been all about fashion, *Uniqlo* claims to be all about functionality. Here I examine this corporate narrative within the context of a new paradigm in cultural sociology that brings to the fore the material and functional aspects of clothing consumption (as opposed to its fashion and identity-related aspects). This case study shows that we might be able to understand the contemporary consumer better, if we study the corporate narratives of our most popular retailers of fashion. After all, their survival depends upon a correct understanding of how exactly today's consumers behave.

Some Perusal Comments. Belk:

- Uniqueness
- Luxury fashion
- Problematize fake vs real items of fashion
- Social constructions of standing out/fitting in
  - Case of Atte Kilpinen's pink tailcoat
- Reproduction of class (through the speed of fashion)
- Influence of digital media and platforms
- 'Coolness' --> authentic --> hard to pine down
  - Subcultures → commodification

Some Perusal Comments. Tokatli

- Functionality not against identity creation and symbolic markers
- Creativity, how much creativity and freedom is there in fashion
- Identity creation vs selection of market-mediated identities
- Who and when plays with identity through fashion?
  - Age, contemporary social values

WHAT IS FASHION?

Fashion is a sign system or language through which people convey symbolic meanings about their individuality and group identification (profession, social status, class, ethnicity, gender, hobby, values etc.)

WHAT IS FASHION?

Fashion != clothes

Fashion != style

Fashion = expressions of cultural themes/beliefs/customs that each are grounded in various "temporal rhythms"

WHEN DID FASHION "BEGIN"?

PRESENTED GRATIS — with WELDON'S LADIES' JOURNAL 3ᵈ Monthly. — APRIL 1895.

J.560   J.561   J.562   J.563   J.564   J.565   J.566   J.567   J.568   J.569   J.570

WELDON'S LATEST NOVELTIES FOR APRIL.

Flat patterns of Costumes 6ᵈ untrimmed 2/– Flat patterns of Mantles or Children's dresses 6ᵈ each untrimmed 1/6.

(COPYRIGHT) DESIGNED BY WELDON & Cᵒ FASHION PUBLISHERS, 7, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON. (PRINTED IN NUREMBERG)

It must be pointed out that there are peoples and **societies without fashion**, for example ancient Chinese society, **where clothing was strictly coded in an almost immutable way**. The absence of fashion corresponded to the totally stagnant nature of society.

…

Prior to this, societies had clothing which was **completely coded**, with any difference depending on whether one belonged to the aristocracy, to the bourgeoisie or to the world of the peasant.

ROLAND BARTHES

THE LANGUAGE OF FASHION

BLOOMSBURY
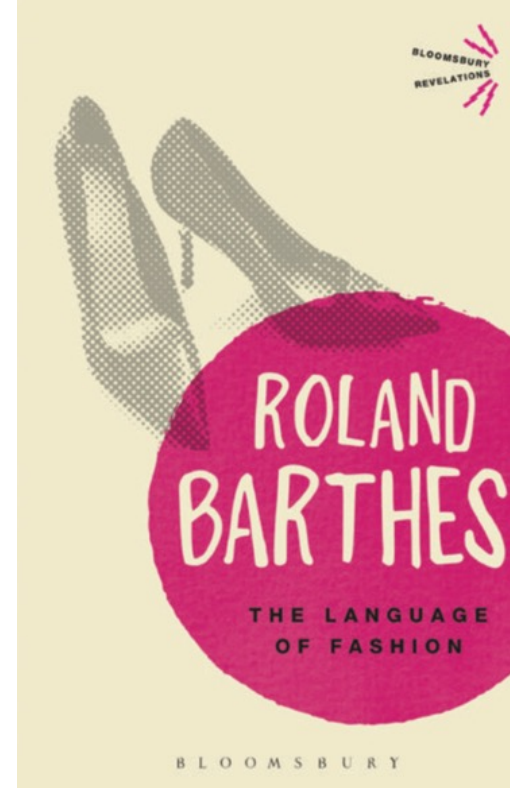
THE ARISTOCRAT

THE PEASANT

"To change clothes was to change both one's being and one's social class, since they were part and parcel of the same thing…. and which one could not transgress without affecting the deeper organization of the world" (Barthes, 2013)

BLOOMSBURY
REVELATIONS

ROLAND BARTHES

THE LANGUAGE OF FASHION

BLOOMSBURY
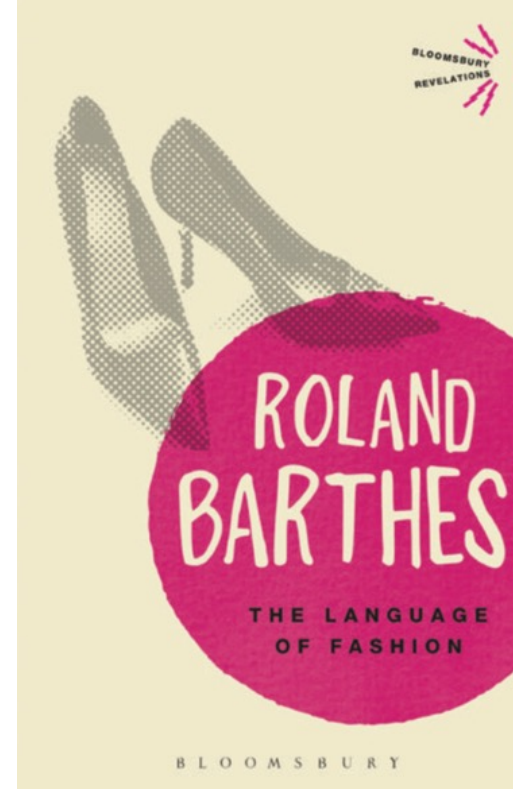
THE ARISTOCRAT

THE PEASANT

Sumptuary laws of the Late Middle Ages prevented commoners from imitating the appearance of aristocrats and also could be used to stigmatize disfavored groups. These laws were instituted as a way for the nobility to limit the conspicuous consumption of the expanding merchant class. If bourgeois subjects appeared to be wealthier than the ruling nobility, it could undermine the nobility's presentation of themselves as powerful, legitimate rulers. This could call into question their ability to control and defend their fief, as well as inspire resistance.

ROLAND BARTHES

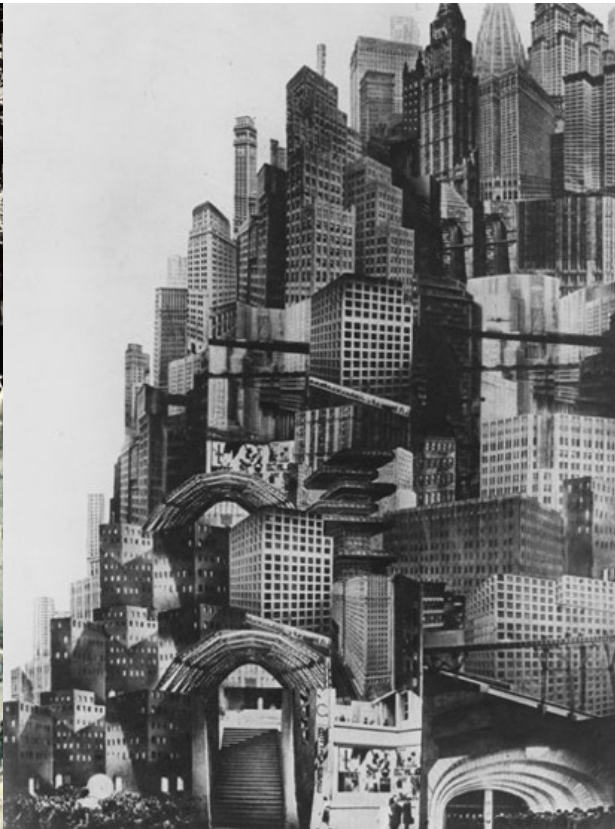THE LANGUAGE OF FASHION

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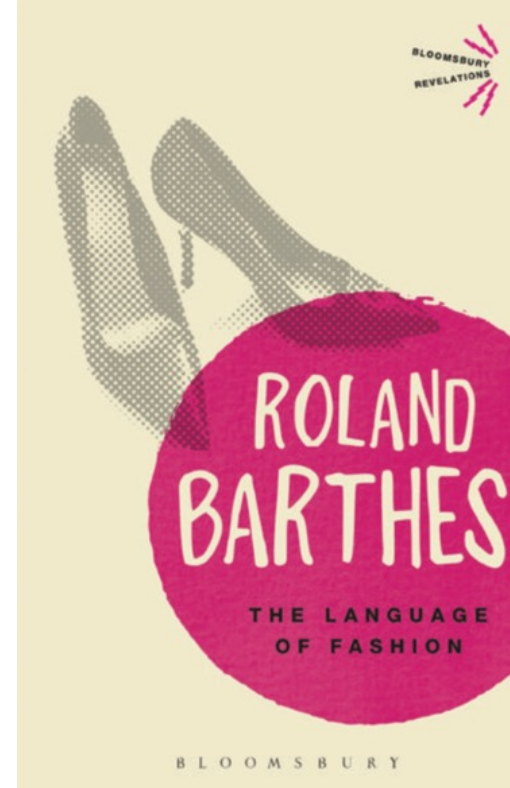
THE ARISTOCRAT

THE PEASANT

"At [Elizabethian] court, however, [the nobleman] was just one nobleman among others. One can easily see the problem the poor fellows faced: how to get the queen to notice them, how to stand out in a crowd?" (Corrigan 1997)

As part of the democratization process [after the French revolution], the many types of male apparel disappeared [the heavily coded kind], leaving one type of clothing. But just as the suppression of social classes at the start of the nineteenth century was illusory (for these classes continued to exist), so men belonging to the upper classes were obliged, **so as to distinguish themselves from the masses, to vary the detail on their outfits, since they were no longer able to change their form**. They elaborated this new notion, which was not at all democratic, and called it *distinction*—the word is suitably ambiguous. It was a question of distinguishing oneself in social terms; by distinguishing oneself socially, one was, one is, 'distinguished'. From this we get dandyism: the extremely refined choice of details. **A man in the nineteenth century, no longer able to modify the form of his jacket, would distinguish himself from the common man by the manner in which he tied his cravat or wore his gloves…**

GEORG SIMMEL'S SOCIOLOGY OF FASHION

- Simmel was an important theorist on modernity and especially urban life
- Simmel understood how urban life was transforming social relations—and fashion

CITY LIFE AND FASHION

- Cities are packed with people—we cannot possible engage or interact with everyone we encounter

- Fashion became the language through which people "talk without talking", signaling who they are and how they should (not) be approached

- Culture became coded into small meanings and visual cues—particularly in clothing—that were constantly in motion

HERBERT BLUMER

Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) developed Werner Sombart's ideas into his theory of "collective selections" and suggests that:

1. Fashion emerges from ==the desire to be in synchrony== with time, not to be "old-fashioned" and therefore "deserving to be excluded"

2. This might have started in the middle ages when the new culture (Dante, Boccaccio etc.) of the "modern" highlighted the difference between the present (14th and 15th centuries) and the (Ancient classical) past

WHAT **NOT** TO **WEAR**
TLC

SPRING FASHION 2019
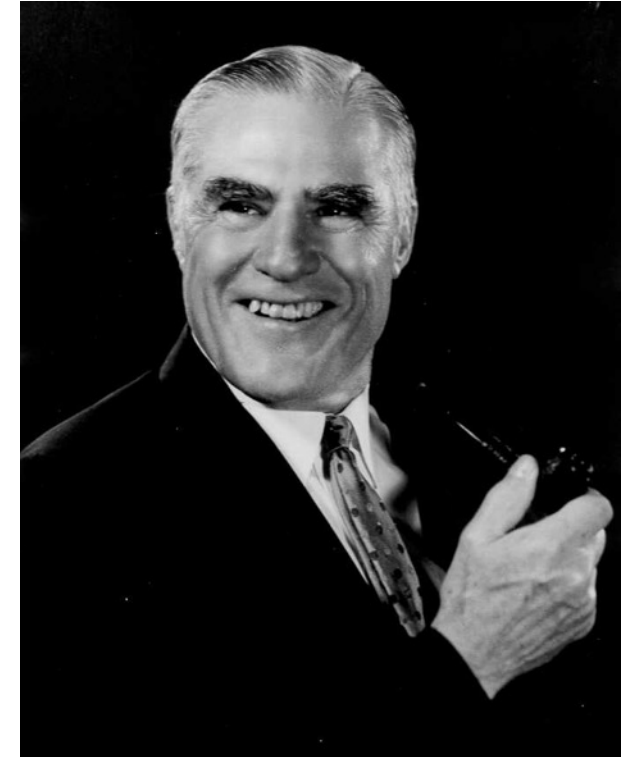
ELLE's Complete Guide To
Spring 2018 Trends
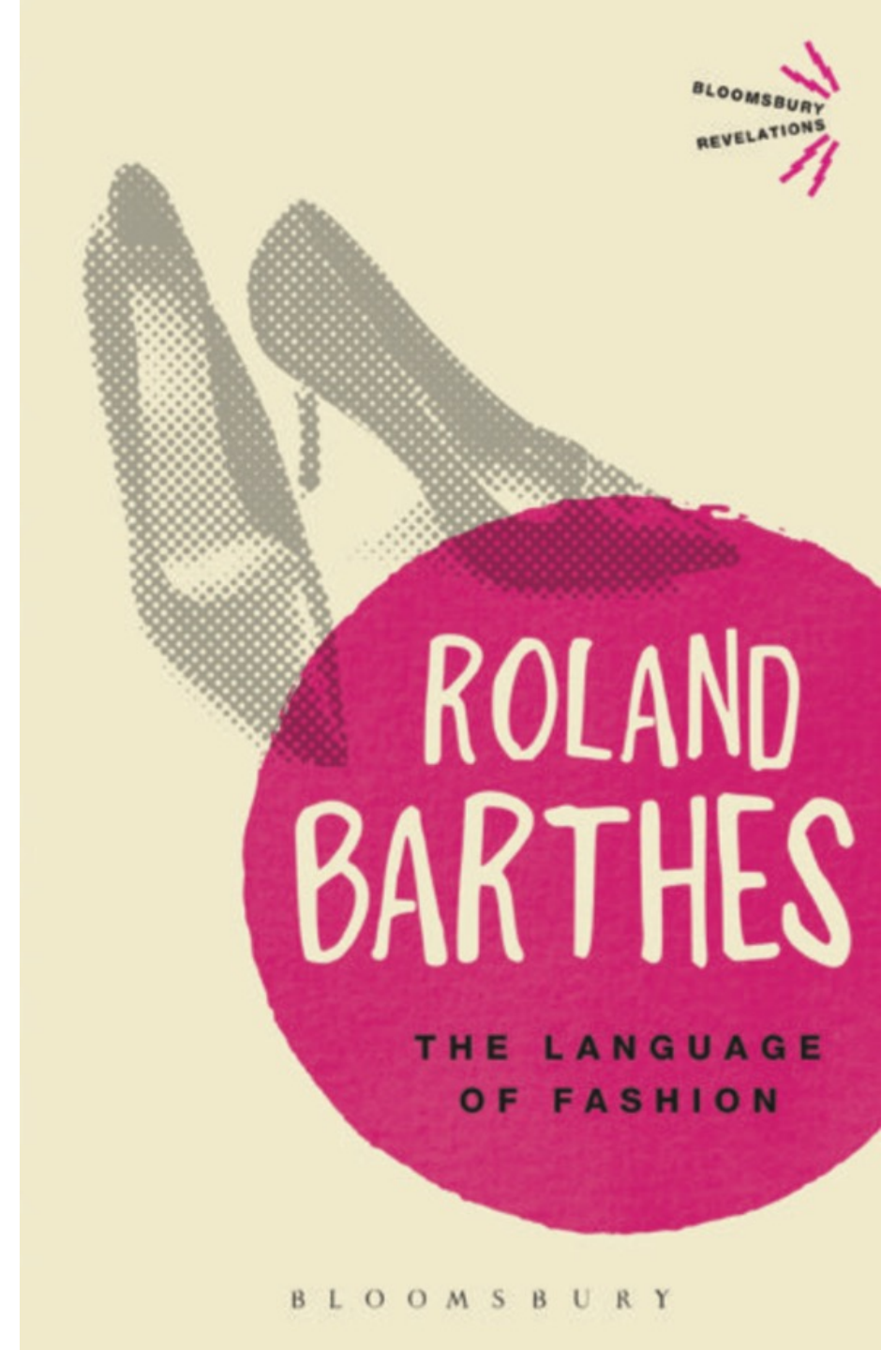
AALTO FASHION MARKETING

SO HOT RIGHT NOW

.com

"Clothing—I am not talking about fashion—knows three timescales, three rhythms, three histories.

There are absolutely specific *events*; there are situations of longer duration called *conjunctures*; and finally there are *structures* which last even longer."

Event   Conjuncture   Structure

One of the discoveries of contemporary historical science has been to show that historical time cannot be conceived of as linear and unique because history is made up of a number of timescales of different lengths which lie over each other. ==Clothing is affected by all three of these timescales.==

"a basic pattern for a civilization"

We are subjected to a kind of optical illusion which **makes us attribute great importance to the annual variation in forms** whereas in fact, in historical terms, these variations are merely part of larger, regular rhythms.
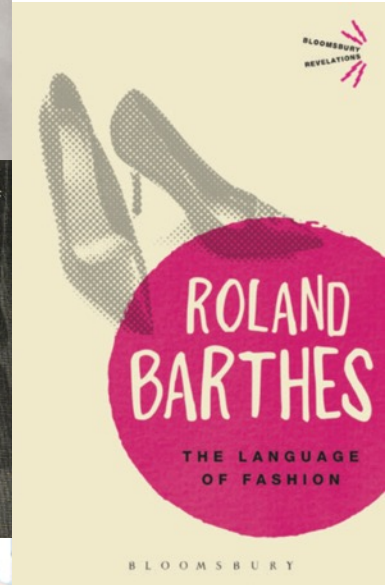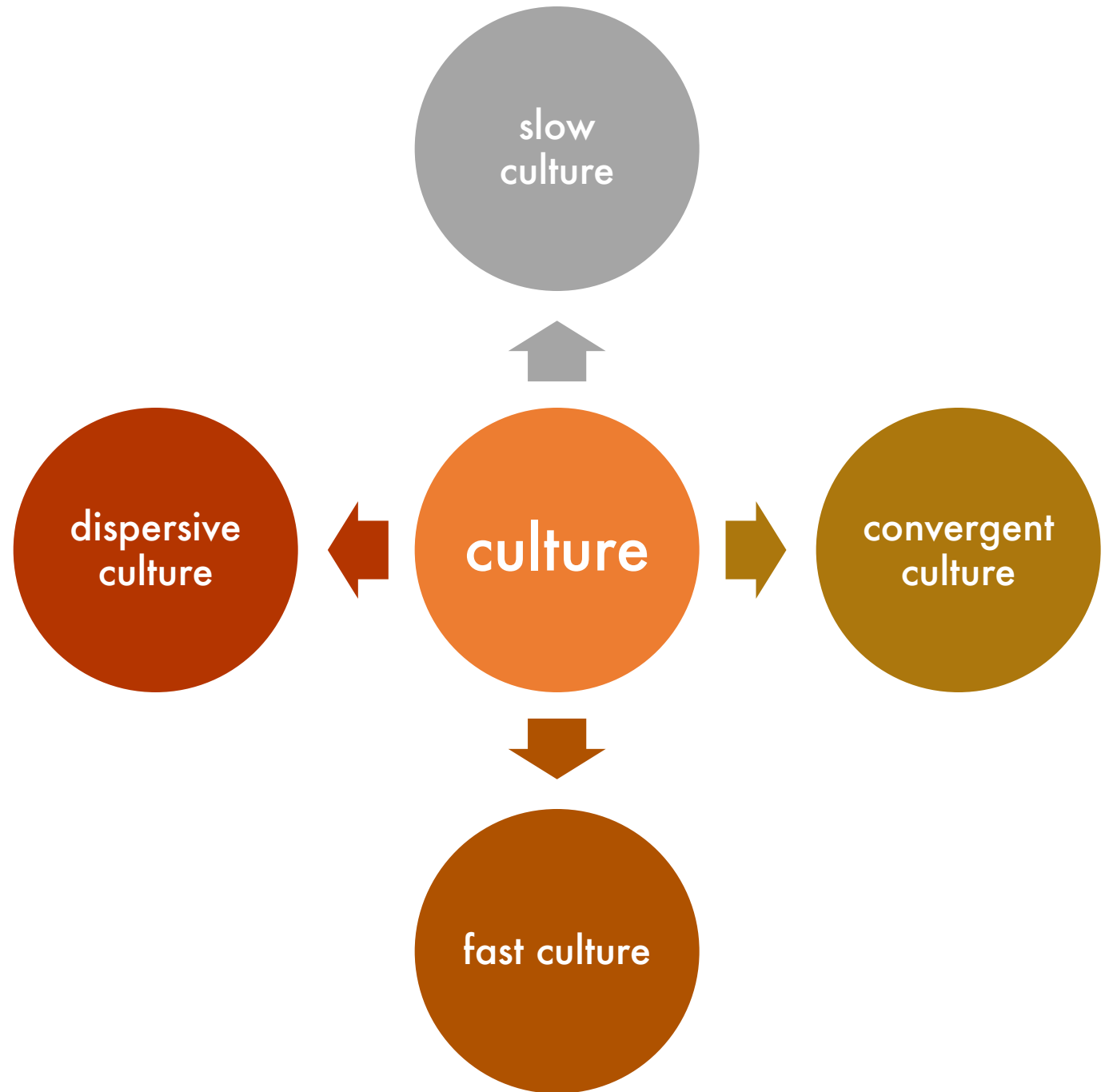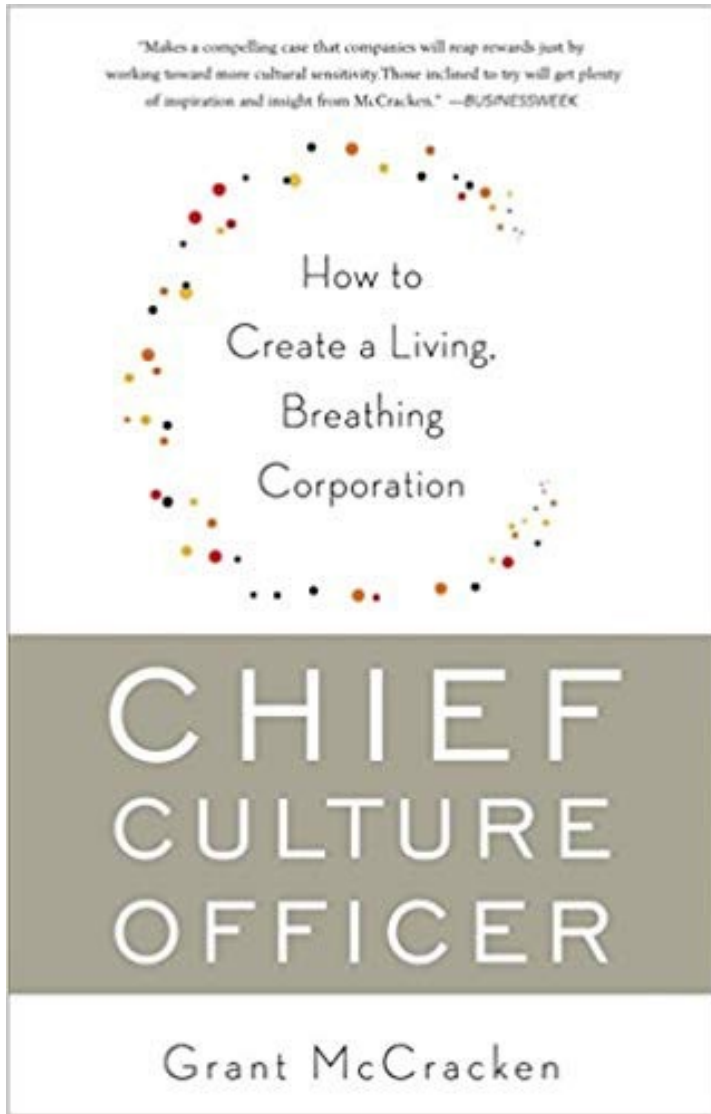
fast culture

slow culture

5
- Tomato Europe
- Potato Europe

6
- Wine Europe
- Beer Europe
- Vodka Europe

7
- Olive Oil Europe
- Butter Europe

8
- Tea Europe
- Coffee Europe

"When I was sixteen [in the 1950s], you could be mainstream or James Dean. That's it. You had to choose." (McCracken 2009)

Taste and Fashion:
The Social Function of Fashion and Style

Jukka Gronow

Department of Sociology, University of Helsinki

In the classical European humanistic tradition, fashion was always thought to be antithetical to good taste. A person blindly following the whims of fashion was without style, whereas a man of style – or a gentleman – used his own power of judgement. Immanuel Kant shared this conception with many of his contemporaries. It is well known that Georg Simmel's idea of a formal sociology was influenced by his reading of Kant's aesthetic writings. Even Simmel's famous essay on fashion can best be understood as a somewhat ironic commentary on Kant's idea of a *sensus communis*: the community of fashion is the real community of universal taste. To Simmel, fashion is a societal formation always combining two opposite forces. It is a socially acceptable and safe way to distinguish oneself from others and, at the same time, it satisfies the individual's need for social adaptation and imitation. Furthermore, the charm of novelty offered by fashion is a purely aesthetic pleasure. Fashion helps to solve – at least provisionally – the central problem of the philosophy of life, also expressed in the antinomy of taste as formulated by Kant. It teaches the modern man how a person can be a homogeneous part of a social mass without losing his individuality, or how he can both stick to his own private taste and expect others – who recognizably also have a taste of their own – to share it. Simmel's suggestion of the 'stylized life-style' further develops the same idea. In modern society, both style and fashion are functional equivalents to 'good taste'.

Jukka Gronow, Department of Sociology, University of Helsinki, Box 25, SF-00014 Helsingfors, Finland.

"Fashion is transitory, otherwise it would become tradition"
   −**Kant**

"Fashion allows an individual to overcome the distance between himself and society"
   −**Simmel**

"Fashion allows a socially valid standard for taste."
   −**Campbell**

"Fashion functions as a substitute standard for taste, without actually being or becoming one."
   −**Gronow**

Reminder: this course is predominantly interested in the relationship between <mark>consumption and fashion</mark>.

How do consumers "do", influence, and sometimes even cope with fashion!

The relationship between fashion and identity is a key concern!

What is an "identity"?

An individual's understanding of who or what they are, and how they present themselves to others

(Belk 1988; Holt 2002; Seregina and Schouten 2016)

THOUGHTS?

Identity as constant narrative process
- Who they were (*past self*), are (*current self*), and are becoming (*aspirational/future self*)

Abundance of available identity resources
- "what stories should I tell"?

The fragmentation of social spheres creates conflicting expectations
- "How do I achieve all that I could or should be?"

Clothing is a special category of identity construction
- Highly visible, symbolic, yet still "everyday" objects

"Clothes as who I am"

- Consumers' everyday relation to clothing
- General appearance one wants to communicate in everyday life (e.g. at work)
- Clothes as practical and symbolic

"Clothes as who I am not"

- Miss-purchases
- Outfit failures and "embarrassing possessions"

"Clothes as who I want to be"

- Searching and reaching out for desired identities
- Trying out different styles
- Inventing and transforming the self

"consumer culture is evidenced as, encouraging a reliance on ever-changing, transient commodities to (in)form the self … Relying on commodities for symbolic anchoring in doing so, a 'psychotic' and precarious subject position is evidenced"

"Unanchored from metanarratives, the marketplace becomes the provider of 'identity kits' and 'symbolic markers' that the subject must look toward in search of her/himself."

"The decisive trick of Consumer culture is to continually 'fail' at creating stable habits" and identities!
Ahlberg et al., 2022

Lambert, 2019: Psychotic, acritical and precarious? A Lacanian exploration of the neoliberal consumer subject

EXAMPLE: IDENTITY CONFLICTS

Identity A: CRITICAL SCHOLAR

- Standing for radical reconfiguration of a Capitalist organized society

- Opposing normative ideas of business attire

Identity B: BUSINESS SCHOOL PROFESSOR

- Implicit teaching neoliberal ideologies

- Having to wear a suit

Solutions to solve conflicts:

1. Demarcating (choose A and reject B)
2. Compromising (create a partway identity between A and B)
3. Synthesizing (take advantages of A and B and form identity C)

- Those objects we love the most synthesize conflicting aspects of identities and give consumers the best of both worlds

Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives

AARON C. AHUVIA*

This article investigates the possessions and activities that consumers love and their role in the construction of a coherent identity narrative. In the face of social forces pushing toward identity fragmentation, interviews reveal three different strategies, labeled "demarcating," "compromising," and "synthesizing" solutions, for creating a coherent self-narrative. Findings are compared to Belk's "Possessions and the Extended Self." Most claims from Belk are supported, but the notion of a core versus extended self is critiqued as a potentially confusing metaphor. The roles of loved objects and activities in structuring social relationships and in consumer well-being are also explored.

Clothing choices are especially vulnerable for identity "conflict" because they interact with so many identity-role situations during the day!
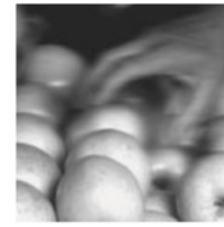
1 MONTH of BUSINESS CASUAL OUTFITS

"The interplay between standing out and fitting in is a basic engine of the fashion process"

(Belk 2019)

Consumers often feel their identity-building projects are intense "personal quests", but in truth similar quests are shared by many in the greater population

(Holt 2004, p. 6)

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Fashion and identity?

Tendency to celebrate "identity innovation" and "playful identity experimentation"—especially in fashion (Holt 2002; Arnould and Thompson 2005)

What about those who are content with their identities, like routine, or do not enjoy fashion shopping (especially in contemporary "bewildering" retail outlets)? (Warde 1994; 2005)

"do today's consumers (who have already turned Inditex and the Fast Retailing Group into global power- houses) really believe that who they are is somewhat undetermined and that they can create identities for themselves – the first step being "to look the part" through fashion consumption?"

The Lululemon Lifestyle: Millennials Seek More Than Just Comfort From Athleisure Wear

Jeff Fromm Contributor ⓘ
CMO Network -
Expert on Millennials, Generation Z and innovation.

A customer looks at athletic apparel inside a Lululemon Athletica Inc. store in Hong Kong, China (Photographer: Xaume Olleros/Bloomberg)

From the gym to the office and from the office to happy hour, millennials can be seen decked out in the style called *athleisure*, documented by Merriam-Webster as "casual clothing designed to be worn both for exercising and for general use."

Zara
Promotes scarcity ("get it while it lasts!") in a surprisingly authoritarian voice, defining what is "in" and "what you should buy" through the extensive use of trend scouts

Uniqlo
Sells fashion "like you would buy a new version of iPhones" by emphasizing functionality

"If we wish to construct, reconfigure, or play with our identities, then fashion consumption might serve as a means. However, it is doubtful that a significant proportion of us actually wish to do so. My argument here is that if this were the case, then the clothing stores of those retailers that we frequent a good deal (enough to turn them into powerhouses with tens of billions of dollars annual sales – here I am referring to the stores of global fashion specialty retailers such as Zara, H&M, the Gap, and Uniqlo) would function as our "volitional sites of self-creation" (Holt, 2002: 87)."

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

THE AESTHETICS OF EACH COLLECTION SERVE BOTH THE VISUAL AND THE FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF THE GARMENTS. DESIGNER TEEMU MUURIMÄKI'S CLEAN SILHOUETTES WORK AS A CREATIVE BACKBONE OF THE COMPANY. WE DELIVER UTILITY AND MINIMALISM.
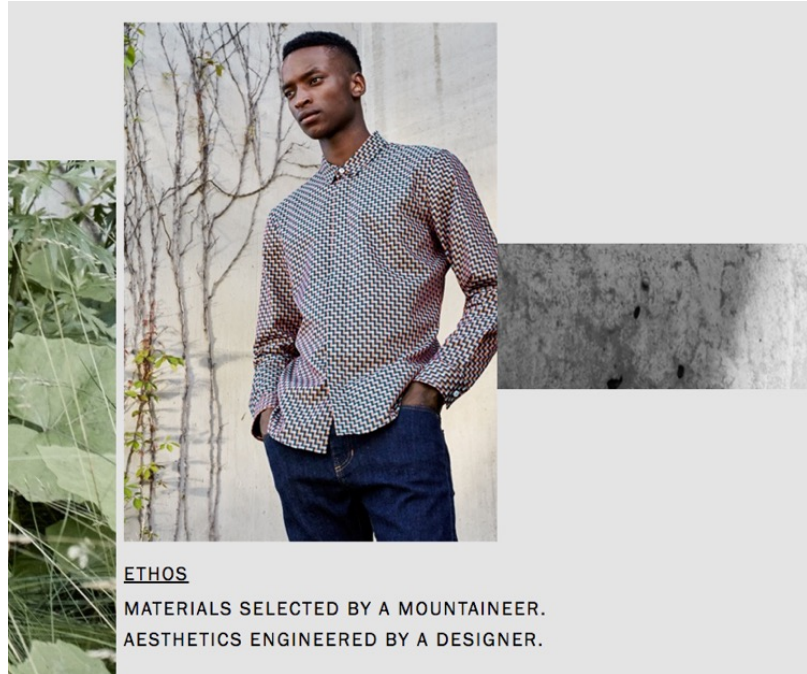
ETHOS

MATERIALS SELECTED BY A MOUNTAINEER.

AESTHETICS ENGINEERED BY A DESIGNER.

"The phrasing used in fashion magazine always has a subtle tendency to transform the linguistic status of the clothing item into one of naturalness or usefulness, to invest an effect or function in the sign" Barthes, 2013

"you are responsible for your body and must invest in it and make it yield benefits – not in accordance with the order of enjoyment – but with the signs reflected and mediated… in accordance with an organisation chart of prestige."

"This is a planned narcissism, a managed and functional exaltation of beauty as the exploitation and exchange of signs"

Baudrillard, 2007: Symbolic exchange and death

The little black dress is the solution. But what's the problem?

Daniel Miller

Little black dress

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other uses, see Little Black Dress (disambiguation).

A **little black dress** (**LBD**) is a black evening or cocktail dress, cut simply and often quite short. Fashion historians ascribe the origins of the little black dress to the 1920s designs of Coco Chanel and Jean Patou[1] intended to be long-lasting, versatile, affordable, accessible to the widest market possible and in a neutral colour. Its ubiquity is such that it is often simply referred to as the "LBD".[2][3][4]

The "little black dress" is considered essential to a complete wardrobe by many women and fashion observers, who believe it a "rule of fashion" that every woman should own a simple, elegant black dress that can be dressed up or down depending on the occasion: for example, worn with a jacket and pumps for daytime business wear or with more ornate jewelry and accessories for evening or a formal event such as a wedding or a ball.

Consumption?
Maybe it is a complex interplay between choice anxiety, femininity, loss of "traditional fashion authority", and peer assurance?

Capitalism?
Capitalism celebrates variety and selection! Why the convergence towards one color and design?

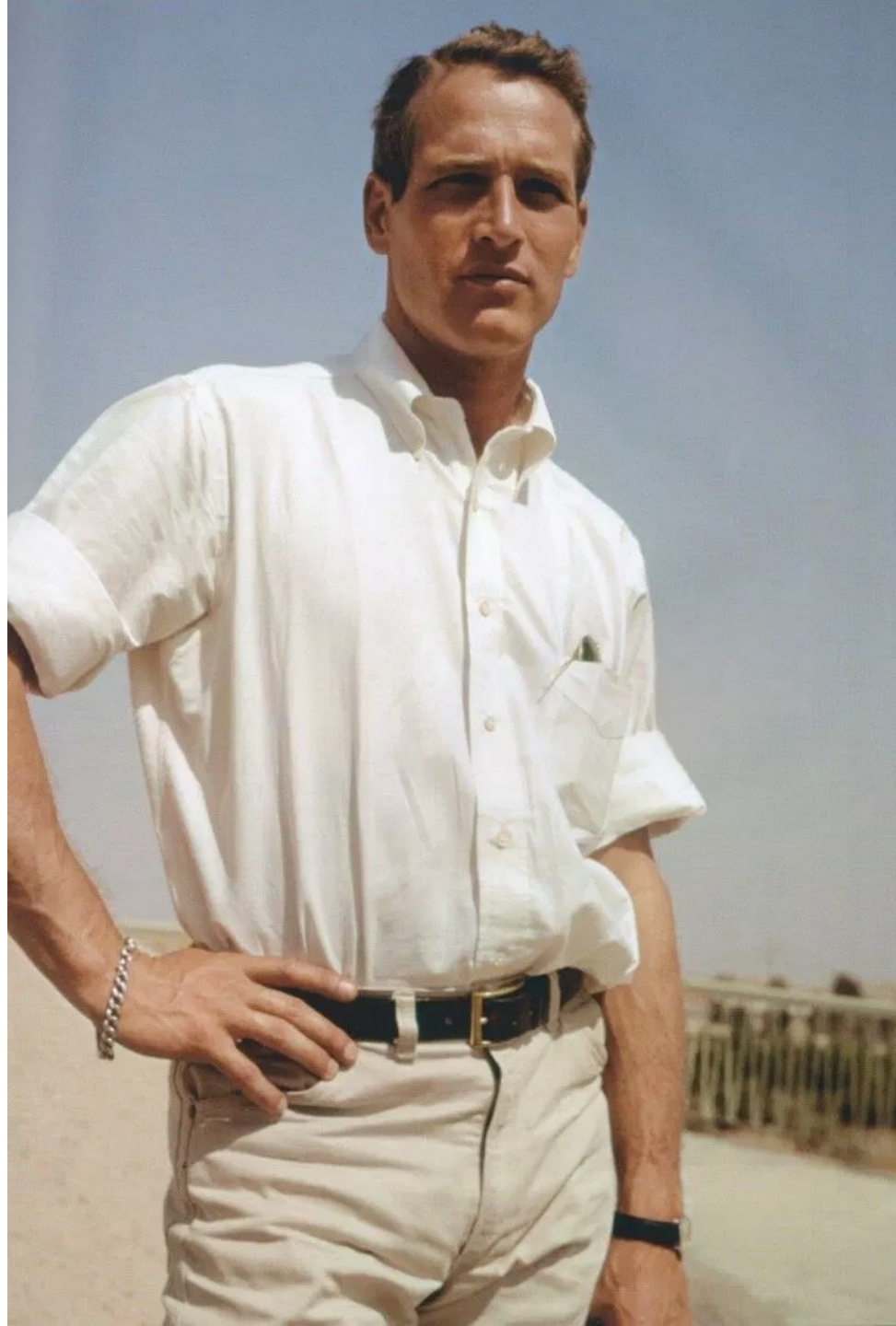**History?**
Is it about the historical democratization of taste and the rejection of ancient (power) regimes?

Modernism?
Is it about stylistic simplicity, rationalism, and aesthetics that we see elsewhere, as in architecture?

Our Button-Down
Often Imitated, Never Duplicated

E. Reverse blazer stripes are the feature of these cotton oxford button-down Polo collar shirts. White on blue or yellow on blue. (106E) $44
Foulard neckwear: blue-yellow on red. (394A) $27

F. Our most popular button-down Polo collar shirt is made of our distinctive, exclusively-woven long staple Pima cotton oxford. In yarn-dyed solids of blue, white, yellow, helio, peach, green, ecru, pink or stone. Truly Brooks Brothers. (001E) $42
Foulard neckwear: blue-green on wine. (391A) $27

G. New striped nylon grosgrain braces with leather ends and brass fittings. In red-blue-gold on navy, blue-gold-green on red or green-red-white on navy. Ours alone in regular or extra long. (265C) $38

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Sleeves	32 to 34	32 to 35	32 to 36	33 to 36

7

What is the difference between fashion and style?

Much contemporary social theory focuses on such individualized identity projects rather than the collective—class-based—identity projects of counterculture and subculture in the 1960s and 1970s. In the individual's ongoing process to create a coherent narrative of the self, style reflexivity is said to be an important ingredient. Style expressions have thus been moved from a collective mode to a personal mode of expression.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CONSUMER CULTURE

SAGE reference online

Style

Style is a concept used to describe the ways in which certain consumers, or groups of consumers, assemble, modify, combine, and act toward consumer objects and activities. The concept is notoriously hard to pin down since it is simultaneously used at different levels of abstraction and to denote a wide variety of consumption activities, both within academia and in everyday use. The most clearly defined use of the concept is within literature dealing with subcultures, but it is also applied within studies of fashion as well as consumer culture studies more broadly.

Most of the time when style is discussed, it is designated to those instances when an active stance is taken with regard to consumption; style is intentional communication, according to Dick Hebdige. Still, even the activities that are not driven by such intentionality would typically lead to something considered a style. Moreover, to be identified as style, consumption activities typically need to be perceived as deviating from a more or less coherent idea of the mainstream. Thus, Hebdige notes, it is a signifying practice where the novel assemblage of elements into style is a way of disrupting existing semiotic sign systems. This having been said, most would agree that also the mainstream has a way in which they assemble, modify, combine, and act toward consumer objects and activities that would have to be described as a style. In essence, it appears that one cannot not have a style. Whether a particular style is good or bad, interesting or boring, in fashion or out of fashion, or in essence stylish is, however, an entirely different question.

In every consumer culture, there is a wide range of available options concerning, for example, clothing, and to create an intended style, certain elements from the overall range of apparel need to be selected and then combined. A unique style is then created through the reordering and recontextualization of objects to communicate fresh meanings, within a total system of significances, which already includes prior and sedimented meanings attached to the object used, notes John Clarke. Style can thereby be seen as bricolage, that is, the appropriation, innovative recombination, and ultimately perversion of readily available signs and material culture.

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SSAGE reference online

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In other words, individual consumers have quite a bit of control over their own "style" but much less so on what is "in fashion"

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
CONSUMER
CULTURE

SAGE reference online

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Personal styles have an evolving continuity and sit at the intersection of fashion and identity

Style

Style is a concept used to describe the ways in which certain consumers, or groups of consumers, assemble, modify, combine, and act toward consumer objects and activities. The concept is notoriously hard to pin down since it is simultaneously used at different levels of abstraction and to denote a wide variety of consumption activities, both within academia and in everyday use. The most clearly defined use of the concept is within literature dealing with subcultures, but it is also applied within studies of fashion as well as consumer culture studies more broadly.

Most of the time when style is discussed, it is designated to those instances when an active stance is taken with regard to consumption; style is intentional communication, according to Dick Hebdige. Still, even the activities that are not driven by such intentionality would typically lead to something considered a style. Moreover, to be identified as style, consumption activities typically need to be perceived as deviating from a more or less coherent idea of the mainstream. Thus, Hebdige notes, it is a signifying practice where the novel assemblage of elements into style is a way of disrupting existing semiotic sign systems. This having been said, most would agree that also the mainstream has a way in which they assemble, modify, combine, and act toward consumer objects and activities that would have to be described as a style. In essence, it appears that one cannot not have a style. Whether a particular style is good or bad, interesting or boring, in fashion or out of fashion, or in essence stylish is, however, an entirely different question.

We will explore these issues of identity, "dress practices", and influences on consumers tastes throughout the course!

FOR THE NEXT TIME..

Class readings:

- Barthes, R. (2013). "On the Fashion System", in *The Language of Fashion.* Bloomsbury.
- McCracken, G.D. & Roth, V.J. (1989). "Does clothing have a code? Empirical findings and theoretical implications in the study of clothing as a means of communication", *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 6*(1), 13-33.

Recommended:

- Barthes, R. (2013). "Fashion and the Social Sciences", in *The Language of Fashion.* Bloomsbury.
- McCracken, G. (2009). "Culture Fast and Slow", in *Chief Culture Officer*.
- Gronow, J. (1993). "Taste and fashion: the social function of fashion and style", *Acta Sociologica*, 36(2), 89-100.