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Defining Fashion: Novelty, Play, and Identity

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the definition of fashion by drawing a parallel between fashion and the aesthetic analysis of games. Specifically, seeing fashion as a performative activity which closely resembles play allows me to respond to two objections that have been leveled against it by Lars Svendsen. The first questions the ability of fashion to truly introduce new and original components; the second challenges the connection between fashion and the establishment of identity. Emphasizing elements such as repetition, interactivity, and episodic playing I defend the aesthetic value of fashion and its potential for introducing original and innovative features while also contributing to who we are, both personally and socially.

On December 14, 2017 Mathew Schneier published an article in the *New York Times* entitled "The Year in Stuff" in which he allowed clothing items to recount the main events of 2017: from the "Pussy Hat" that thousands of women wore while protesting Donald Trump inauguration, to the bathrobe, a sore reminder of Harvey Weinstein's despicable thread of harassment. Fashion is powerful and, at the end of 2017, it seemed to be the kind of thing that may be used to describe, highlight, and critically inform events that affected and continue to affect us all, on multiple levels.

Yet fashion is not, or not yet, a frequent topic of philosophical discussion and while the attitude toward fashion is shifting, (Wolfendale &

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Kennett, 2011 and Matteucci & Marino, 2015) it has not reached the prominence that it deserves.

In this paper, my focus will be on the definition of fashion; more narrowly, I aim to discuss the performative nature of fashion for, I maintain, while fashion has undeniable objective quality – in the sense in which fashion *is* about fashion items – it is better understood as an activity in line with aesthetic phenomena such as dances, musical performances, and, as I will argue, games.

I am not, it should be said upfront, concerned with the question of whether fashion can be considered art. Differently put, I am not interested in the demarcation between the "artistic" and the "aesthetic," nor am I trying to position fashion among the arts, thus gauging whether it can be regarded on par with the restricted group of the fine arts, or whether it instead belongs to the popular arts or to no art at all. My interest is instead simply in what fashion *is*, an investigation that is largely within the domain of the aesthetic, but that does not necessarily require the enumeration of the conditions that would make fashion an art.

In the first section of this paper, I will briefly review some historically significant definitions of fashion and introduce, in tandem, Lars Svendsen's analysis, and criticism, of fashion. In the second section, I will narrow the discussion to two of Svendsen's most pressing objections: his denial that fashion can be defined as "the production of the new" and his skepticism towards fashion's ability to significantly contribute to the shaping of our identity. Crucially, my response to these objections is supported by an understanding of fashion as a performance and by what I believe to be a marked similarity between the ways we interact with fashion and the way

we interact with games.

1. Philosophy and Fashion: An Overview

The philosophical literature on fashion can be roughly divided in three areas; the first two, the ethical and the aesthetic analysis of fashion – and the questions and concerns they often share – will only be mentioned briefly. I will instead focus more closely, as anticipated, on the definition of fashion.

The ethical discussion on fashion sees it primarily as the kind of object that has a market value: something that can be bought, but also something that can affect personal and social dynamics. The ethical discussion on fashion often targets our overtly consumerist society pointing to how certain items can sharpen existing social and class barriers, but it has also highlighted ways in which fashion can instead be seen as a social and cultural connector, as an anchor for a sense of community and identity. Samantha Brennan, for example, has written eloquently on the relation between fashion and recognition in the communication and display of sexual identity.[2] In her attempt to challenge a certain feminist disdain for fashion, she re-interprets the "personal is political" slogan in light of the fashion choices that can help the expression of sexuality within the LGBTQ community, thus echoing, in a way, Judith Butler's notion of gender as a series of performances (Butler, 1980: 134)

A different strand in the ethical analysis of fashion is also beginning to

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[2] Samantha Brennan, 2011. "Fashion and Sexual Identity, Or Why Recognition Matters," in *Fashion: Philosophy for Everyone. Thinking with Style*, Jessica Wolfendale and Jeanette Kennett eds. Malden: Wiley Blackwell: 120-134.

incorporate a reflection on globalism. The fashion world is not limited to fashion capitals and while Milan, London, New York, and Paris are inevitably associated with haute couture, much fashion happens on the sidewalks, globally. Websites such as *Runway Passport* have been monitoring runways that are "away" from traditional centers seeking local labels and independent designers. Additionally, much effort is spent today, by those who work in the fashion industry, in making fashion sustainable – despite the constant rise of fast-fashion. A topic, this latter one, that deserves further exploration and that calls for a collaboration between fashion, philosophy, and the social sciences.

A second area of discussion is the aesthetic of fashion. Two debates deserve to be mentioned. On the one hand, while philosophers have not devoted much energy to the critical and evaluative assessment of fashion items (as in the kind of criticism that typically targets movies, paintings, etc.), they have nonetheless investigated whether fashion can count as an art on par with the established arts or whether it is instead solely a craft. On the other hand, the aesthetic analysis of fashion is tied to the debate on the aesthetics of the body.

Whether fashion counts as art may appear as a trite problem for the interest in such concerns has undoubtedly waned. However, it would be wrong to simply ignore it for it rests on good grounds. To begin with, fashion designers have, historically, aspired at precisely such a labeling of their works. Well-known examples are Charles Frederick Worth and Paul Poiret who, at the end of the XIX century, created the first fashion houses and began to sew a tag with the dressmaker's signature to their creations, creations that, in turn, were given recognizable names, such as Poirot's

exquisite 1907 creation, the 'Josephine'.

A similar desire animates a number of contemporary designers. Think of the emergence of conceptual clothing in the 1980s and of the works of Martin Margiela, Rei Kawakubu, Comme des Garcons, and more recently Iris Van Herpen. Think also, importantly, of the numerous fashion shows hosted by museums such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, of collaborations between designers and museums, as the one between Louis Vuitton and Takashi Murakami, and of institutions blending the two, as the Fondazione Prada in Milan and the Cartier and Vuitton Foundations in Paris.

I will not, in this paper, provide an exhaustive assessment of this debate. While I tend to believe that designers can produce works of high art, I am also aware that examining such an issue ought to involve the consideration of a number of satellite questions, from the aesthetic experience of fashion, to matters of representation, to curatorial efforts – too many, and mostly beyond the scope of this paper.

Attention, however, will be given to the connection between fashion and body aesthetics mentioned above. Body aesthetics is blossoming, thanks, also, to the comprehensive work of Sherri Irvin (2016) and fashion is a good entryway to the debate. Fashion is "to fashion," an active verb: to discuss fashion is to discuss what we mean by fashioning oneself and the ways in which bodies can be adorned, modified, enhanced, constrained, etc. But to develop this topic, I have to first introduce a third strand in the analysis of fashion – the one on which I will primarily concentrate in this article. I am interested in exploring the definition of fashion: what fashion is.

In approaching this question, one must acknowledge at least two attempts at isolating some of its main features.

The first is fashion's ability to incorporate opposite categories, a feature that underscores fashion's dialectical nature. Clothes are supposed to cover but also reveal; a certain style is chosen in order to promote individual identity while also being tied to group and class identity; fabrics complement the body but they also create new contours (and perhaps a whole new body), etc. (Wilson, 1985). The expression of such oppositions is echoed in the theoretical paradigms developed by sociologists Georg Simmel and Pierre Bourdieau.

For Simmel, fashion is an example of the dualism inherent to our society, the one that invites imitation – or generalization – by emphasizing the importance of "fitting in" but that can also inspire creativity and allow for differentiation. Bourdieau similarly saw fashion simultaneously as a social demand and as a social divide or, better, as one of the instruments that perpetuate social hierarchies. In 'Haute Couture and Haute Culture,' he contrasted the field of large-scale production, which he saw as being entirely dependent on the rules of commerce and therefore for the purpose of profit only, with haute couture and its refined aesthetics, which can instead claim creative and artistic independency (Simmel, 1980).

The emphasis that sociology has given to the dichotomies inherent to the nature of fashion is also present in recent feminist analyses of it. Marjorie Jolles and Shira Tarrant, for example, begin their introduction to *Fashion Talks* a collection of essays aiming at the re-positioning of fashion within feminist theory, by anticipating that the essays in the volume will "grapple with how fashion both *enables* and *constrains* expression in ways

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that are uniquely raced, gendered, classed, sexed, and bound to national and cultural histories" [my emphasis] (Jolles & Tarrant, 2012: 1). In her article 'Stylish Contradiction: Mix-and-Match as the Fashion of Feminist Ambivalence,' (Jolles, 2012: 227-244) Jolles further explores the issue by looking more narrowly at the topic of "what a feminist looks like." Here the proposal is to embrace duality: the feminist self, she concludes, may be just as split and contradictory as fashion itself.

One more compelling example pointing to the duplicity of fashion is Richard Shusterman's account of the fit-model (Shusterman, 2017: 91-106). In a decidedly autobiographical essay (it is worth observing, in passing, that several articles on fashion rely on a markedly autobiographical voice), Shusterman describes what used to be his role as a fit-model in the New York fashion industry. Despite being hidden from the mainstream channels and invisible to the world of runways and fashion magazines, fit models are essential to the fashion industry as they are supposed to epitomize the standard consumer: average height, average weight, average measures. They are the models we are not supposed to see but the ones our clothes tend, for the most part, to be designed on.

The second feature that is typically highlighted when trying to capture the nature of fashion is its ability to constantly produce something new and to do so at a very fast speed. Fashion items come into fashion and go out of fashion very quickly. Every three months fashion houses introduce new collections and every fall is the beginning of a new cycle, as shown by *The September Issue* (2009), R.J. Cutler's documentary on the legendary 2007 five pounds issue of *Vogue*.

Even when we distance ourselves from the grinding clock of haute

couture and Fashion Weeks, the duo of novelty and speed remains a staple of what fashion is, especially today. Look at fast fashion. Zara, H&M, Uniqlo, and American Apparel, to only mention some of the most prominent, promise to offer design at a very low price and a seemingly interminable streak of new models. In the game of providing something new and fast, fast fashion meets, if not surpasses haute couture. It is not a case, in this respect, that the two are at times known to blend as shown by collaborations between designers of the like of Moschino, Stella McCarthy, Karl Lagerfeld and H&M, and by the fact that top designers like Prada, Armani, and Comme des Garçons rely, for their sales, on what may be described as "fan-base" merchandise. Prada sport, Armani X, See by Chloe, Marc by Marc Jacobs, etc. are secondary lines that offer fashion items at a fraction of the price of the primary line while still delivering whatever sense of satisfaction may come from a logo (and the logo is often, in these cases, rather visible). The fashion trend-setter may look down at secondary lines, but they are both the financial engine of a growing number of fashion firms and what guarantees fashion's promise of novelty of speed.

These are rather general observations, but just like the contradictory nature of fashion described above, they are also founded on a solid theoretical background. Fashion, Walter Benjamin claimed, is the "eternal return of the new," (Benjamin, 1999: 544). Fashion is the emblem of modernity where modernity is seen as the curious age, the one that looks ahead and that abides by the Kantian motto *sapere aude*. Furthermore, this forward looking way of categorizing fashion typically sees the new, in fashion, as intimately tied to the shaping of identity. The production of the new gives one the possibility of choice and through the choices one makes

an identity is built. Fashion, differently put, offers us the possibility of manifesting who we are in ways that are fresh while also authentic. Novelty allows one to break away from the past, from already established choices and alternatives, thus opening the door to individual creativity.

I am particularly interested in the connection between fashion, the new, and identity, but it is a contentious one and it has come under the direct scrutiny of Lars Svendsen who has written a popular, while comprehensive, philosophical analysis of fashion (Svendsen, 2006). Specifically, I am interested in two objections. The first is his skepticism toward fashion's ability to produce anything fundamentally "new" - a skepticism that, in turn, jeopardizes fashion's status as a representative of the spirit of modernity. In this respect, Svendsen remarks that the *new* of fashion is not as revolutionary, rebellious, or innovative as one may think (or as it may have been).[3] Today, the fashion industry is hardly interested in the new and it instead relies on both the recycling of previous styles – with designers typically re-proposing old collections[4] – and on a logic of supplementation "by which all trends are recyclable and a new fashion hardly aims at replacing all those that have gone before, but rather contents itself with supplementing them. […] the old and the new – or rather, perhaps, the old and the old – exist side by side." (Svendsen, 2006: 33).

The second aspect of Svendsen's analysis that interests me is his disillusionment toward the supposed ability of fashion to contribute to our identity. The consumption of fashion is hardly, he argues, selective

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[3] The famed example here is Paul Poirot's haute couture.

[4] It should be noted how, at least initially, designer did this to protest the very obsession with new clothes (think of Martin Margiela's work in 1990s).

consumption. Choosing a style is more about conforming to a certain pre-packaged "experience" than it is about defining who we are. Additionally, the mechanism of rapid replacement that characterizes fashion impedes the possibility of a narrative development of the self, privileging, in its lieu, the frantic, fragmented, and irrational chase for a look and for the "spectacle," to echo Guy Debord, that a new style may offer. Openly embracing Søren Kierkegaard, Svendsen reminds us of the poor fate of the aesthete. Fashion does not contribute to our identity: its pluralism and eccentricity should be unmasked as a sort of repetitive uniformity, as yet another appendix of consumerism.

In the next section, I will consider both objections; their assessment will allow me to introduce the idea of "fashion as play" which, I argue, can contribute to the debate on the definition of fashion while also touching upon its aesthetic and ethical features.

2. Fashion, Performance, and Games

Svendsen's verdict on the essence of fashion as an aesthetic phenomenon is rather negative. While not entirely disagreeing with his analysis – as there are undoubtedly reasons to question today's fashion industry – I believe his arguments to be too blunt. In what follows, I will argue against his objections in light of an analysis of fashion that sees it as similar to the kind of performance that characterizes games.

In this paper, I am focusing on fashion narrowly, namely by referring primarily to clothes and accessories. But what kind of objects are clothes? In an immediate sense, an item of clothing is an aesthetic object to a similar

extent to which a discrete item is an aesthetic object. It is inevitable to associate fashion to an item, be it clothing, jewelry, make-up, etc., and there are obviously good reasons for thinking about fashion in this way. To begin with, there is a material counterpart: silk, leather, wool, and so on, a material counterpart that is being manipulated. After all, the discussion on fashion involves a discussion of tailoring and design and both, in turn, depend on an understanding of the fabrics utilized.

There is also the fact that, as objects, clothes can be collected. Displays of clothes collections have made their way into museums: think of as Alex Kalman's installation, *Sara Berman's Closet*, at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and of the collections of style icons – from Marie Antoinette to Jackie Kennedy to Lady Gaga.

Also, as items, clothes are meant to be transported and packaged in interesting ways: examples are folding ballet flats, Longchamp's totes from the Pilage collection, or the 1980s K-way (which is making a come-back). They are meant to move and to move with us. Fashion, in fact, ages with us too. Clothes get too small when children grow, too tight or too loose according to our weigh; they fade, age, and break.

But these considerations, which verge towards the relation between fashion and movement, add a second layer to the discussion of what kind of object fashion can be: for fashion is not just a static object, it is always more than just an item.

Clothes, as I have hinted at above, assume major, or at least connotatively distinct significance when worn; when they become an extension of the body and, with it, of the body's activity: a performance. I have mentioned tailoring above and it must now be added that a central

concern of tailoring is movement: how a blazer will fit shoulders and arms when bending the elbow, the arch of a shoe, the way in which the hem of pants sits on the foot when standing and walking.

The very shape of clothes is often supposed to remind us of movement and of the *possibilities* of movement. By enveloping the body, clothes highlight and modify anatomical structures. Stiletto heels are a frequently mentioned example, but it is interesting to also consider how clothes can expand, as opposed to limit, the boundaries of the body: think of balloon skirts, boyfriend jeans, oversized coats and of course athletic gear which is specifically designed to enhance movement.

Additionally, fashion is closer to a performance because wearing clothes is an everyday ritual, something we set ourselves to do every morning. Getting dressed, changing outfit, adjusting clothes to our body are enormously significant acts.

Lastly, and perhaps less intuitively, I would like to introduce a different characterization of the performative side of fashion, namely that, as a performance, it is close to play. "Play," in my analysis, has a two-fold connotation. First, the concept of fashion as play has to be understood as something engaging, experimental, and even playful. Second, fashion can be seen as a *form* or specific kind of play which shares some of the characterizations that have been observed in games.

I suggest that thinking of fashion in this way can help us assess and respond to Svedsen's objections.

3. A Defense of Fashion

As mentioned, Svendsen has expressed skepticism toward an identification of fashion with the "new" and the production of the new. In his analysis, fashion's promise of the "new" is broken by the inevitable return to previous styles, by the repetition of something that already exists: a cycle that ultimately leads to nothing more than supplementation. Fashion keeps adding but, in the end, it adds the same thing, over and over.

This is, in part, true. It is hard to ignore a markedly consumerist side of fashion but fashion has not, I believe, entirely forgone innovation and while a logic of supplementation has been embraced, it would be incorrect to see it as the only force driving production and consumption. In fact, I believe that, in the case of fashion, repetition may very well be key to innovation.

It is helpful, to introduce my argument, to look at some examples of how fashion can still maintain the promise of the "new". A first, and leading one, is vintage.

Vintage is now immensely popular and highly coveted. A vintage Rolex is chic, a new one not so much, and the same can be said for Vuitton trunks and Chanel bags. While vintage is about re-introducing styles, it would be wrong to classify it as a *replication* of previous styles. Vintage clothing does not just supplement new ones. Vintage garments are often to be worn together with new ones because by mixing old and new items the possibilities for a more original look multiply.

But even aside from vintage, the logic of supplementation does not hold. It is interesting, in this respect, to think of the importance of wearing the very same outfit. School uniforms deserve to be mentioned as they are so frequently altered by the children and young adults wearing them,

thereby innovating even when repetition is mandated by institutional codes. Fashion icons are very much aware of such dynamics. André Leon Talley's caftans, which he started wearing in past years[5] are a testament to these claims. As the former American editor-at-large of *Vogue*, Talley is one of most important names in contemporary fashion; his 'armors,' as he calls them, share similar designs (kaftans, after all, have not changed in thousands of years) with small variations that accentuate his ingenuity and better emphasize his status in an environment, the fashion world, he knows all too well.

The idea of repetition as a form of innovation is the first visible similarity between games and fashion. To be good at a game – and this has been exacerbated by videogames – one has to play a lot. Moves need to be mastered through repetition and playing a given level multiple times is essential to gaming.

In the same vein, the fashion conscious are perfectly aware of the times a certain outfit must be repeated in order to be perfected: from something as minimal as tucking a shirt to more elaborate, layered outfits. Each repetition can introduce something new just as practicing, and repeating, a move in a game leads to more stylish, skilled, and innovative play.[6]

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[5] One of the most interesting is the one designed by Dapper Dan which Talley has worn to all the press conferences and screenings for his bio-pic *The Gospel According to Andre* (Novack, 2018).

[6] In a recent article, inspired by Georg Simmel's analysis of fashion, Stefano Marino defends a similar thesis. He sees fashion as a "movement of imitation on the condition of differentiation" thus emphasizing how imitative processes must, in fashion, be

Reflecting on the synergy between repetition and innovation leads us to a further parallel between games and fashion, namely the importance of interactive dynamics connecting the designer's intention and the audience's reception and interpretation.[7] Clothes are designed and so are games, but they require an audience to be "enacted". Computer games such as *Second Life* allow the player a large degree of freedom, a freedom that closely resembles the creation of a personal style. Even more importantly, the style one is able to create by interpreting what offered by the market can reach institutional recognition. Street fashion has long inspired new trends and collections, from the infamous "heroin chic" to the compelling designs of Hood by Air and Opening Ceremony.

An innovative style can then emerge from repetition especially when repetition is coupled with the idea of an interactive practice, one connecting the designer with the public but also the public with different time periods – as in the case of vintage – and with the broader socio-cultural context.

But while my arguments pertaining to the importance of repetition as a means to innovation can save fashion from Svendsen's first criticism and thus effectively prove that fashion is still capable, and can be defined, by the rhetoric of the "new," they are not jointly sufficient to respond to the second

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accompanied by slight variations, modifications, and by the introduction of original features. (Marino, 2017: 12).

[7] The importance of interactivity has been highlighted by several accounts of video games, from Grant Tavinor (2009) to Aaron Meskin and Job Robson's concept of 'self-involving interactive fictions'. More should be said about the extent to which fashion can be analyzed similarly and specifically if the kind of interactivity offered by fashion is immune to Dominique MacIver Lopes' rejection of collective authorship, but I will not, here, touch upon this debate.

criticism he has leveled against fashion: that it cannot contribute to the shaping and display of identity and that if a sense of identity is indeed afforded through fashion, it is ultimately superficial, vacuous, and lacking a narrative component.

In this case as well, I find Svendsen's assessment to be anxiously conservative. Specifically, Svendsen overlooks a more nuanced sense in which clothes participate in the establishment of identity: they allow us to play with it. Fashion may at times be superficial, but it is undeniably fun, and while identity is often, and rightly, related to a sense of integrity and moral authenticity, it would be mistaken to deprive it of a certain experimental quality or, I would go as far as saying, a certain frivolity.

This element of play is, needless to say, another parallel between games and fashion. In games, play allows for the embracing of different identities, as in the case of avatars, of course, but also in children's role playing. And those roles are significant because they teach social dynamics that allow one to contemplate and experiment with different sides of who we may be, want to be, or pretend to be. Fashion is, in this respect, highly comparable.

Virtually everyone experiments with fashion: changing outfit allows for the contemplation of potential incarnations of oneself thus making it a promoter of self-discovery. And changing looks has tangible effects: it is empirically true that a different outfit can lead to different psychological reactions and that they can affect social and ethical responses in others as well as in ourselves. Fashioning oneself is, in a way, fashioning the

character one can be.[8]

The construction of identity also brings us back to the body and to how identity is constructed through physicality. Fashion makes us aware of our presence, of the space we occupy, and of the boundaries that the shape of a body inevitably establishes. It is informative, in this sense, of a conception of identity that is not limited to life events and thought processes - typically the focus of philosophers working on the topic.

There is a third observation to be made in relation to fashion and identity, in addition to the importance of play and to the ability of fashion to make us reflect on identity as something that is also fundamentally embodied that I care to highlight as it further allows me to respond to Svendsen's criticism. For one of the justifications he summons up in order to deny a connection between fashion and identity is that fashion does not provide us with the sense of continuity that is a staple of narrative identity. What makes fashion unable to convey identity is that fashion is episodic as opposed to being based on a narrative construction, and that narrative construction is, in Svendsen, what is ultimately needed for a sense of identity and accompanying authenticity.

But is it? And, more broadly, is narrative a necessary vehicle for the establishment of identity?

While I will not attempt to introduce a comprehensive analysis of narrative theories of identity here, I believe that the idea of fashion as a performance, and as a performance that resembles a game – the idea, as I labeled it, of fashion as play – can provide us with a glimpse into the

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[8] See, for example, Eva Hagber Fisher "How I Learn to Look Believable: Sometimes All You Can Control is What's on the Outside" *The New York Times*, Jan. 3, 2018.

limitations of a narrative approach to identity.

Narrative conceptions of the self emphasize the importance of "weaving," to borrow James Olney's expression, experiences together (Olney, 1998). Marya Schechtman's "Narrative Self Constitution View," which champions this approach, argues, for example, that the expression of identity requires narrative and diachronic connections in order to fulfill the four essential features for personal existence: survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation (Schechtman, 1996).[9] Accounts of narrative different from each other, with stronger positions such as Schechtman's and more moderate accounts, as Peter Goldie's "narrative thinking" (Goldie, 2012). But despite their differences they all tend to highlight the importance of connecting the events of a life into a whole, the importance of giving them a structure, whether based on causal or on emotional connections or on a blend of both. Those connections are to lead to a sense of closure, an ending, and that ending is likely to be charged with moral significance.[10]

Svendsen, in his analysis of fashion, appears to endorse a similar view. Fashion's failure to convey a stable sense of identity resides in the inability, of fashion, to unify and weave the events of our life in a coherent

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[9] Schechtman has published several versions of her argument. In her most recent book, *Staying Alive*, she sees the need of building our lives as a narrative as being mostly implicit but she maintains the importance of seeing our lives as diachronic wholes.

[10] It should be noted that this approach to the notion of the self has come under scrutiny: from the risk, emphasized by Peter Lamarque (2007) and to some extent by Peter Goldie, of treating our lives as the lives of fictional characters, to Galen Strawson (2005 and 2015) who altogether rejects the notion of narrative identity in favor of an episodic understanding of the self.

narrative. And to this extent, he is not, I believe, mistaken. Fashion and games are more easily associated with an episodic, as opposed to narrative structure. We begin and end a game, we allocate a limited amount of time to it, and we see our participation in the game as a distinct segment in our everyday activities. When thinking of fashion as a performative act, the similarity becomes apparent. The wearing of an outfit can be seen as an episode in our life, as one side of our identity. There is a work outfit, a Friday night outfit, the Sunday at home outfit, and the gala outfit. And more.

But these episodes are significant on their own and can have important effects on the construction of identity. Different outfits can be associated with distinct moments of our lives which, while not necessarily connected, are charged with both aesthetic and ethical value. Practices such as choosing the "right" outfit for a given event or the way in which we translate our interests, bodies, age, and social status into a look may very well be limited to episodic occurrences, but they should not be downplayed when considering the overall question of identity.

Provocatively, the "episodes" afforded thanks and through fashion can be seen as ways of experimenting with identity, of playing with it. More radically, fashion can be seen as a costume and one that is not too far from the stage costumes we encounter in theater. Festivals such as Burning Man, certain electronic music concerts, and at times large art events such as Art Basel (in its multiple locations) seem to encourage one to perform, to act, to dress to play a part. They are often colorful, abstruse, and irreverent; one would be pressed hard to see how such outfits could fit into an everyday schedule of days at the office. But they nonetheless create a sense of collective identity coupled, in some cases, with cultural and political

statements. These outfits are also, it would be wrong to deny it, liberating. They allow for play. For identity may need a strong sense of authenticity but it also needs escapism and the frivolity I mentioned before. Fashion is not the only way of investigating this portion of identity, but it certainly is one.

Identity is not just about authenticity and about reaching a certain solidity in our actions and self-assessment. It is also about how we may get there and about all the missteps and improvisations. Fashion allows us to think of identity as something that includes and is based on such experimentations, tentative moments, on mistakes, no matter if the outfits chosen are wildly original or rigidly conservative or utterly mundane. There is a lighter self and a lighter sense of identity that we want to begin to contemplate, one capable of play, and one that, through play, points to an ongoing and performative way of looking at who we are. Fashion is key to the exploration of this approach to identity and the self.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I argued in favor of the aesthetic value of fashion by responding to two criticisms leveled against it by Lars Svendsen. By relying on the similarity between games and the idea of fashion as play, I justified two assertions. The first is that fashion can indeed suggest something new. It can, if we understand fashion as a practice that creates by way of repeating, practicing, and imitating. Such a movement resembles the act of playing a game and it also supports the idea according to which both games and fashion rely on something close to a form of interactive intentionality that sees the audience as an active component in the shaping of the game/outfit.

The second assertion I defended is that fashion can convey a sense of identity. It can because identity, and with it a conception of the self, can be treated episodically and because identity allows for play, for the wearing of different masks, for the contemplation of being someone else. Fashion is a form of play, a repeated performance which affords a high degree of emotional involvement and affects the self profoundly: self-discovery, transformation, and the contemplation of alternative identities are games we play each morning – when we get dressed.

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