

**Proceedings of the
European Society for Aesthetics**

Volume 9, 2017

Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

Published by the European Society for Aesthetics

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Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Founded in 2009 by Fabian Dorsch

Internet: <http://proceedings.eurosa.org>

Email: proceedings@eurosa.org

ISSN: 1664 – 5278

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Ideas Pertaining to a Phenomenological Aesthetics of Fashion and Play: The Contribution of Eugen Fink

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ABSTRACT. There has been until recent times a general tendency to ignore clothing and fashion in the domain of the human sciences, in general, and in philosophy in particular. However, clothing, understood as a basic human phenomenon, and fashion, understood as one of those fundamental phenomena that really form or influence the *Zeitgeist* of the present age, have proven to be far too important for philosophy to simply keep on ignoring them – at least as far as their influence on our everyday life and, on a specifically aesthetic level, as far as their role in shaping our taste and lifestyle are concerned. Inasmuch as dress immediately covers the surface of our body and thus presents it to the world as “never naked” but “always dressed”, clothing and fashion are clearly connected in the very first place to the bodily dimension of life. Together with certain recent developments of pragmatism such as so-called somaesthetics, the philosophical tradition that has probably paid the greatest attention in our age to the rehabilitation of the embodied constitution of the human world-experience as such is phenomenology. In my paper I will focus primarily on the contribution of Eugen Fink, a great phenomenologist who, in his short but remarkable book *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel* (1969), investigated fashion with great interest and accuracy, understanding it as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. I will first contextualize Fink’s contribution to an aesthetics of fashion within his more general conception of the philosophical significance of play, presented in his essay *Oase des Glücks. Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (1957) and his systematic treatise *Spiel als Weltsymbol* (1960). Then I will provide an in-depth analysis and interpretation of his short but remarkable book *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel*, thus promoting a re-evaluation of Fink’s important (but relatively unknown, little studied, and seldom mentioned) contribution to a strictly philosophical investigation of the

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I would like to thank Ted Byrne for his precious help in the revision of the English text, and Olimpia Malatesta for her precious help in the translation of some passages of Fink’s book from German into English.

significance of dress, and outlining some elements of a phenomenological aesthetics and anthropology of fashion. Indeed, in this perspective the human being is understood as not only the rational and language-using animal but even as the animal that dresses itself – and quite often, actually, in a very fashionable way!

1. Philosophy and/against Fashion

I would like to start my contribution by asking a few questions. First of all, why study fashion in general and, in particular, why is fashion an object of interest for philosophy? And, along the same lines, but less generally and with indirect reference to the philosopher that I will spend most of my time on (namely, a German phenomenologist: Eugen Fink), why is fashion especially interesting in the context of aesthetics and why is it appropriate to inquire into it from a phenomenological perspective? In the present contribution I will attempt to provide at least provisional answers to these questions and, in doing so, I will pay attention – following Fink – to certain affinities between fashion and the phenomenon of play (*Spiel*, in German). With regard to this last point, what will emerge in the course of my paper are the irreducibility of both these phenomena to single principles or one-sided explanation schemes, as well as the markedly anthropological-aesthetic character of fashion and play, and their function of relief, unburdening and freedom (contrary, for example, to the quite common idea of fashion as a kind of tyranny, dictatorship etc.).

As to the first and second questions, it can be said that, notwithstanding the great importance for the human being of clothing, in general, and fashion in particular, there has been until recent times a general tendency to ignore them and neglect their intellectual and institutional significance. As has been noted, “the study of fashion is of recent origin”, and it took quite a long time “before fashion became a legitimate research topic for scholars, including social scientists”; an interest in fashion as a topic arose during the 19th century, but even in the 20th century “fashion and/or clothing as a research topic have never been popular”; so, the

scholars involved in the field of fashion studies often had and still have to face “the academic devaluation of fashion as a topic”.²

If this is true for the field of social and human sciences in general, it is even more valid for and appropriate to the specific field of philosophy. In fact, if we set aside the literary and/or essayistic writings of several poets and novelists, intellectuals, artists or moralists (including, for example, Adam Smith, George Bryan “Beau” Brummell, Giacomo Leopardi, Honoré de Balzac, Thomas Carlyle, Jules-Amédée Barbey d’Aurevilly, William Makepeace Thackeray, Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Oscar Wilde, Adolf Loos, Karl Kraus and others),³ if limit ourselves to the more precise and delimited concepts of “philosophy” and “philosopher”, that is, to works that can be considered as strictly speaking “philosophical”, it becomes difficult to avoid the impression of a veritable “philosophic fear of fashion”.⁴ Of course, it is possible to come up with a list of philosophers who have provided, sometimes only short and episodic remarks on fashion, but occasionally instead extended analyses and systematic observations about it. Focusing our attention only on the last centuries, such a list might include, for example, authors like Christian Garve, Immanuel Kant, Georg W.F. Hegel, Hermann Lotze, Friedrich Nietzsche, Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Theodor Vischer, William James, Émile-Auguste Chartier (commonly known as Alain), Walter Benjamin,

² Kawamura 2005, pp. 6-8. As noted by Elizabeth Wilson (2003, pp. 47, 271), fashion has been “constantly denigrated” and therefore “the serious study of fashion has had repeatedly to justify itself”: “all serious books about fashion seem invariably to need to return to first principles and argue anew for the importance of dress”.

³ To be precise, I refer to Adam Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759), George Bryan “Beau” Brummell (*The Book of Fashion*, 1821), Giacomo Leopardi (*Dialogue Between Fashion and Death*, 1824), Honoré de Balzac (*Treatise on Elegant Living*, 1830), Thomas Carlyle (*Sartor Resartus*, 1833-34), Jules-Amédée Barbey d’Aurevilly (*Dandyism*, 1845), William Makepeace Thackeray (*The Book of Snobs*, 1848), Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier (*On Fashion*, 1858), Charles Baudelaire (*The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863), Stéphane Mallarmé (the fashion magazine *La Dernière Mode*, 1874), Oscar Wilde (*Philosophy of Dress*, 1885), Adolf Loos (*Why A Man Should Be Well-Dressed*, 1898), Karl Kraus (*The Eroticism of Clothes*, 1906).

⁴ I borrow this expression from Hanson 1993.

Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Lipovetsky.⁵ However, notwithstanding this tradition of philosophical perspectives on fashion⁶ it is difficult to deny that, in general, “fashion has been virtually ignored by philosophers, possibly because it was thought that this, the most superficial of all phenomena, could hardly be a worthy object of study for so ‘profound’ a discipline as philosophy”; in short, fashion “cannot at any rate be said to be a fashionable theme in philosophy”, it has not been “considered a satisfactory object of study”.⁷

However, it has been recently noted that “sooner or later everything comes to interest philosophy”; if, on the one hand, “there is a view of the field according to which philosophy once encompassed every inquiry and went on to lose parts of itself one by one as each field saw how to be scientific”, on the other hand there is also a view of the field according to which “philosophy’s curiosity continues to seize on more of what is said and done and not yet brought into philosophy’s consciousness”: if it was “relativity a century ago”, perhaps “it’s brain science and film today” (and also fashion, I would add).⁸ Fashion surely represents a basic phenomenon

⁵ More precisely, I refer to Christian Garve (*Ueber die Moden*, 1792, in the first volume of his work *Versuche über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Literatur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben*), Immanuel Kant (*Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View*, 1798: § 71), Georg W.F. Hegel (*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 1835-38: § 2(c) of the chapter “The Ideal of Sculpture”), Hermann Lotze (*Microcosmus: An Essay Concerning Man and His Relation to the World*, 1856-64: a part of the second chapter of the fifth book of the second volume), Friedrich Nietzsche (*Human, All Too Human*, 1878-79: vol. II, § 209 of Part One and § 215 of Part Two), Herbert Spencer (“Manners and Fashion”, 1854, and *Principles of Sociology*, 1876: §§ 408-415 and 423-426 of the fourth part of the second volume), Friedrich Theodor Vischer (*Vernünftigen Gedanken über die jetzige Mode*, 1859, and *Wieder einmal über die Mode*, 1879), William James (*Principles of Psychology*, 1890: a few passages of the tenth chapter), Alain (*Vingt leçons sur les beaux-arts*, 1929-30), Georg Simmel (*On Fashion*, 1911), Walter Benjamin (a part of his monumental and unfinished *Passagen-Werk*), Roland Barthes (*The Fashion System*, 1967), Jean Baudrillard (*Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 1976: chap. 3), Gilles Lipovetsky (*The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, 1987).

⁶ On this topic, see Marino 2016.

⁷ Svendsen 2006, pp. 7, 17.

⁸ Pappas 2016a, p. 73. As Eugen also Fink explains: “All phenomena can represent an occasion to it [*scil.* to philosophy] for pondering. Even the phenomenon of fashion (*Alle Phänomene können ihr Anlaß zum Nachdenken werden. Auch das Phänomen der Mode*)” (Fink 1969, p. 15).

of the modern and contemporary age, one of those phenomena that have proven to be far too important today for philosophy to simply keep on ignoring it.⁹ Already at the beginning of the 20th century Georg Simmel had understood and made explicit that “the *increased* power of fashion [had] overstepped the bounds of its original domain, which comprised only externals of dress, and [had] acquired an increasing influence over taste, theoretical convictions, and even the moral foundations of life in their changing forms”.¹⁰ About one hundred years later, which also means after the extraordinary influence of such artistic movements and tendencies as American pop art and, in particular, Andy Warhol (who notoriously associated in an explicit way high and popular culture, and also art and fashion, eventually leveling out every class or level distinction between them),¹¹ this has been acknowledged by some leading theorists. According to the Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen,

[f]ashion has been one of the most influential phenomena in Western civilization since the Renaissance. It has conquered an increasing number of modern man’s fields of activity and has become almost ‘second nature’ to us. So an understanding of fashion ought to contribute to an understanding of ourselves and the way we act. [...] Fashion affects the attitude of most people towards both themselves and others, [...] and as such it is a phenomenon that ought to be central to our attempts to understand ourselves in our historical situation [...]. [A]n understanding of fashion is necessary in order to gain an adequate understanding of the modern world.¹²

⁹ Not by chance, in the last few years some philosophical works on fashion have appeared, attempting to overcome the abovementioned hostility between philosophy and fashion. See, for instance, Svendsen 2006; Scapp & Seitz 2010; Wolfendale & Kennett 2011; Pappas 2016b.

¹⁰ Simmel 1997, p. 193.

¹¹ On the unprecedented significance of Warhol to properly understand contemporary culture, in general, and today’s “widespread aestheticization”, in particular, see Mecacci 2017.

¹² Svendsen 2006, pp. 7, 10.

Finally, as to the third question, I argue that within the broad and complex realm of various philosophical disciplines (ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, politics, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, etc.), should one want to assign fashion to a particular domain, it would be definitely aesthetics. Several reasons may be put forward for this. For example, fashion is basically an aesthetic topic because it has essentially (that is, according to its very essence or nature) to do with the fundamental aesthetic phenomena of experiencing, enjoying and appreciating surfaces, appearances, visible manifestations, coupled with imagination, creativity, style, beauty (or, in the case of “avant-garde” dresses and collections, with a deliberate absence of beauty, but rather with shock, unexpectedness or even uneasiness). Furthermore, if it is true that fashion can be understood today as the result or product of what has been defined as an “industrialized kind of inspiration”,¹³ then it might also be included (with photography, film, modern design, popular music etc.) in the domain of the so-called “industrial fine arts” that are a compelling phenomenon for contemporary aesthetics to deal with.¹⁴ During the 20th century the latter have become even more influential and relevant than the traditional arts included in the “system of the fine arts”, at least as far as their influence on our everyday life is concerned, and fashion in particular has gradually acquired a leading role in shaping our taste or, as it were, our *sensus communis aestheticus*.¹⁵ So it is apparent that fashion, together with other arts and/or crafts belonging to the domain of today’s “hyper-aesthetic” or “vaporized aesthetic” world,¹⁶ compels us to broaden and rethink the vocabulary and conceptuality of aesthetics – for instance, with regard to such notions and problems as beauty, inspiration, disinterestedness, aesthetic enjoyment as contemplation vs. consumption, individual vs. collective creativity, etc.

The preeminent aesthetic character of fashion has been emphasized, among others, by Elizabeth Wilson, who proposes “an explanation in aesthetic terms”: for Wilson, fashion is “a branch of aesthetics”, it is “one

¹³ See Pedroni 2012.

¹⁴ See Vitta 2012, chap. 1-2.

¹⁵ See Matteucci 2016.

¹⁶ See, respectively, Di Stefano 2012 and Michaud 2003.

among many forms of aesthetic creativity which make possible the exploration of alternatives”; in short, it is “a serious aesthetic medium”.¹⁷ As we will see, Fink is also very clear in emphasizing the particular aesthetic function of fashion, its belongingness to an aesthetic domain that, as such, is irreducible to the logic of economics, politics or ethics.¹⁸ On this basis, it can be said that one of the main reasons why fashion undoubtedly represents an important element of our world, something that greatly conditions our lives and even contributes to the definition of the *Zeitgeist* of the present age, probably lies in its aesthetic potentialities. For example, it lies in the capacity of fashion to express, through aesthetic means, symbolic contents that come to play a relevant role in the definition of both our individual and collective identities. As further observed by Wilson, fashion represents “an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society”; for her, “everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles”, and she eventually claims that in various cases the theorists’ attempts to reduce fashion to psychology or sociology have led us to exclude, “or at best minimise, the vital aesthetic element of fashion”.¹⁹

2. Fink’s Phenomenological Approach to Play

Now, inasmuch as dress immediately covers the surface of our body and thus present it to the world as “never naked” but rather “always dressed”, clothing and fashion are clearly connected in the very first place to the bodily dimension of life. What lies at the heart of the philosophic fear of fashion, from Plato until today, is precisely squeamishness about the body

¹⁷ Wilson 2003, pp. 116, 245, 268.

¹⁸ Fink 1969, pp. 109-111. To be precise, Fink speaks of a “peculiar aesthetic function of fashion (*eigentümliche ästhetische Funktion der Mode*)”, and also observes that “only when one makes it clear that fashion has to do neither with a moral nor with an unmoral business (*die Mode kein moralisches Geschäft betreibt, aber auch kein unmoralisches*), but is rather an aesthetic realm beyond good and evil (*jenseits von Gut und Böse ein ästhetisches Reich*), can one get closer to its fascinating and enchanting essence” (Fink 1969, pp. 70-71).

¹⁹ Wilson 2003, pp. 3, 9.

as an object worthy of intellectual attention.²⁰ Together with certain recent developments of pragmatism like so-called somaesthetics, the philosophical tradition that has probably paid the greatest attention in our age to the rehabilitation of the embodied constitution of the human world-experience as such is phenomenology. From Husserl until today, investigating the body has represented a major goal of inquiry in the phenomenological tradition that has shown the body's "ontological centrality as the focal point from which our world and reciprocally ourselves are constructively projected".²¹ Furthermore, as far as our specific interest in aesthetics is concerned, phenomenological aesthetics is apparently undergoing today a process of rediscovery, appreciation and further development, as testified by various anthologies and monographs.

Far from being irrelevant for a philosophical inquiry into fashion, this proves to be very important, namely because (1) not so many philosophers, in general, have addressed fashion as a subject of inquiry, and (2), even among those philosophers who have, not so many really took into consideration the body/dress relationship, which is actually essential. A relevant exception to this mainstream is precisely represented by a phenomenologist, and indeed a very important one: Eugen Fink, emphatically defined by Husserl himself as "the greatest phenomenon of phenomenology".²² In fact, in his 1969 contribution entitled *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel* Fink investigated clothing and fashion with great interest and accuracy, connecting them to the basic anthropological structure of the human being and, in particular, to the fundamental human phenomenon of play. *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel* is a short but remarkable book that, despite its capacity to provide penetrating insights into various social, anthropological and aesthetic aspects of fashion, still

²⁰ Pappas 2016a, p. 87n.

²¹ Shusterman 2000, pp. 270-271 (to be precise, Shusterman refers here to Merleau-Ponty). In his pioneering work on somaesthetics, that is, an aesthetics precisely centered on the living body (the soma), Shusterman goes so far as to emphatically define an important phenomenologist like Merleau-Ponty as "something like the patron saint of the body [...] in the field of Western philosophy" (Shusterman 2008, p. 49).

²² Husserl, quoted in Moore & Turner 2016, p. 1. Indeed, the very title of my contribution clearly echoes that of Husserl's fundamental book from 1913: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*.

represents a relatively unknown and little studied contribution in this field of research. This is testified by the fact that Fink's book is seldom or never mentioned in the main works (articles, anthologies, monographs, etc.) that continuously appear in the broad and nowadays fully developed field of fashion studies, probably because an English translation is still missing – although Fink's work would surely deserve it.²³

Fink (1905-1975) was a German philosopher belonging to the so-called phenomenological movement. More precisely, he was one of the last pupils of Husserl and, beginning in 1928, his main scientific assistant, who greatly helped him in organizing and transcribing his late manuscripts. After the Second World War Fink became one of the main representatives of the tradition of phenomenological philosophy at the University of Freiburg, where he studied and then worked as professor from 1948 onwards. He is perhaps best-known as the author of a fundamental introduction to Nietzsche's philosophy and of a *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (obviously preceded by Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* in five parts, stemming from his 1929 Paris lectures), as well as for his ontological-cosmological interpretations of the concepts of play and world in his essay *Oase des Glücks. Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (1957) and in his book *Spiel als Weltsymbol* (1960).²⁴ As I said, however, he is also the author of a short but remarkable contribution to the philosophy of fashion published in 1969 under the title *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel*.

Following the careful and detailed reconstruction and interpretation of his entire path of thinking, from his early essays to his late philosophical achievements, provided by an Italian expert in the work of Fink, Simona Bertolini, it is possible to divide his thought into three phases:

²³ As the translators of the English version of Fink's fundamental writings on play explain: "We hope that the present translation will help to move the Anglophone study of Fink beyond his significance as a colleague of Husserl and Heidegger and to inaugurate a greater consideration of his original contribution to twentieth- and twenty-first-century thought" (Moore & Turner 2016, p. 10).

²⁴ See Fink 2016, now gathering in English translation all his writings on this subject: the essays *Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play* (1957) and *Play and Celebration* (1975), the additional short texts *Child's Play* (1959), *Play and Philosophy* (1966), *The World-Significance of Play* (1973) and *Play and Cult* (1972-73), and above all the systematic book *Play as Symbol of the World* (1960).

(1) The phenomenological apprenticeship in the late 1920s and 1930s, leading to the attempt to provide a critical reconsideration, and a systematically coherent and integrating reinterpretation of Husserl's transcendently-oriented philosophical program,²⁵ and then to the development of an original kind of "me-ontology" – that is, an ontology of the *me-on*, of "no-thing" as the "non-being" or "that-which-is-not-a-being", and finally of the originary relationship between being and nothing.

(2) The ontological "turn" of his philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s that, to some extent, led him closer to Heidegger's new way of thinking after his own "turn",²⁶ and which Fink eventually developed in terms of a phenomenologically-grounded cosmology. Namely, a philosophy centered on the concept of *kosmos* (expressed in German with such words as *Welt*, *Weltganzheit*, *Weltsein*), connected in turn to the concept of play (*Spiel*), that even comes to the point of coining the notion of "cosmological difference" between world and beings²⁷ and to define the human being as the *ens cosmologicum*.

(3) Then, still on the basis of the central role assumed by the concepts of world and play that, as such, are never put into question or abandoned²⁸ (just like his basic phenomenological approach, by the way),²⁹ the significant emergence during the 1950s and 1960s of new interests and developments in Fink's philosophy. This gradually led him in the direction of a phenomenological anthropology³⁰ and also pedagogy³¹ focused on what we may call the fundamental phenomena of the human way of inhabiting the

²⁵ Bertolini 2012, p. 57.

²⁶ I obviously refer to Heidegger's famous *Kehre*, following the interruption of the project of a phenomenological-hermeneutical ontology based on an existential analytic of *Dasein* that he had developed in his 1927 masterwork *Being and Time*.

²⁷ Fink's concept of the "cosmological difference" may clearly remind us of Heidegger's famous idea of the "ontological difference" between Being and beings, but does not fully correspond to it.

²⁸ "The notion of *world* is the key concept of Fink's entire post-war philosophical work. [...] The concept of *world-totality* (*Weltganzheit*) is the veritable barycentre of Fink's philosophy" (Bertolini 2012, pp. 128, 242).

²⁹ See Bertolini 2012, pp. 137n, 181, 218, 225, 244.

³⁰ Bertolini 2012, p. 255n.

³¹ Bertolini 2012, p. 161n.

world (or, in a Heideggerian fashion, of our way of “being-in-the-world”).³² As has been noted, “against [the] traditional views of play” that often consider it as “mere idle amusement, to be valid only as a restful pause which helps us return all the more energized to what is ‘really’ important”, Fink develops

a speculative phenomenology of play that begins from the sort of play with which we are all familiar and from there attempts to reflect on play, moving from child’s play all the way up to cosmic play, where the world itself is conceived as a “*game without a player*”. Along the way, he broaches such wide-ranging topics as embodiment, ontology, theology, sports, pedagogy, mimesis, cult practices, mythology, drama, and anthropology [and also fashion, we may add at this point].³³

So, it is precisely in the context of this late phenomenological-anthropological development of Fink’s philosophy that his short book on fashion from 1969 also must be placed. As I said, one of the main concepts of this entire phase of Fink’s thinking is that of play (*Spiel*). In his 1960 systematic work on this subject, *Spiel als Weltsymbol*, Fink first explains why play must be considered as a philosophical problem (chap. 1); then he provides a reconstruction of the metaphysical interpretation of play – especially focusing on Plato and the ontological devaluation of play at the beginning of metaphysics – and the interpretation of play in myth (chap. 2-3); finally, he focuses on what he calls the worldliness of human play, in contrast to both the metaphysical and mythological interpretations of play, and defines it as “the ecstase of the human being toward the world and the proof of the shining back of the world into being that is open to the world” – where the latter, in turn, is understood as “a game without player” (chap. 4). As we also read in *Oase des Glücks*, “[p]lay is a phenomenon of life that everyone is acquainted with firsthand” – like clothing and fashion, one might add (which clearly implies that they are specific objects of interest for an approach like the phenomenological one that attempts to philosophize

³² See Bertolini 2012, pp. 43n, 99n, 102n, 157n, 160n.

³³ Moore & Turner 2016, p. 1.

from within our firsthand experience in general). For Fink, “[p]laying does not simply occur in our life like the vegetative processes”, but

it is always an occurrence that is luminously *suffused with sense* (*sinnhaft*), an enactment that is experienced. [...] Play is not a marginal manifestation in the landscape of human life, nor a contingent phenomenon only surfacing from time to time. Play belongs essentially to the ontological constitution of human existence; it is an *existentiell*, fundamental phenomenon. Certainly not the only one, but nevertheless a peculiar and independent one, one that cannot be derived from the other manifestations of life. Merely contrasting it with other phenomena still fails to achieve an adequate conceptual perspective. Nevertheless, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the decisive fundamental phenomena of human existence are interwoven and entwined. They do not occur next to each other in isolation; they permeate and pervade one another. Every such fundamental phenomenon thoroughly determines the human being. Shedding light on the integration of the elementary aspects of existence – its tension, its conflict, and its backwards-turning harmony – remains an open task for an anthropology that [...] penetrates into the paradoxes of our lived life. [...] Death, work, ruling, love, and play form the elementary structure of tension and the outline of the puzzling and polysemous character of human existence. [...] [A]ll the essential fundamental phenomena of human existence shimmer and appear enigmatic in an ambiguous way. [...] The enactment-character of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse; play is existence that is moved in itself, as it were. [...] If one defines play, as is usually done, only in opposition to work, actuality, seriousness, and genuineness, one merely places it, falsely, *next to* other phenomena of life. Play is a fundamental phenomenon of existence, just as primordial and independent as death, love, work and ruling, but it is *not* directed, as with the other fundamental phenomena, by a collective striving for the final purpose. It stands *over and against* them [...]. The play of human beings [...] is a phenomenon of existence of an entirely enigmatic sort. [...] All play is pleurably attuned, joyfully moved in itself – it is animated. [...] This pleasure in play is a strange pleasure that is difficult to grasp, one that is neither merely sensuous

nor yet merely intellectual; it is a creative, formative bliss of its own kind and is in and of itself polysemous, multidimensional. [...] This pleasure of play involves taking delight in a “sphere”, in an imaginary dimension. [...] Playing is a fundamental possibility of social existence. Playing is interplay, playing with one another, an intimate form of human community. [...] Originally play is a portraying symbol-activity of human existence in which the latter interprets itself. [...] Play is primordially the strongest *binding* power. It is community-founding.³⁴

It can be incidentally observed that, especially with regard to the last remarks in this long quotation, Fink’s comments are strongly reminiscent of some of the features of play that, in close connection with two other concepts (namely, symbol and fest), had also been highlighted by Gadamer in those same years in order to grasp the essence of art and beauty.³⁵ For both philosophers the essence of play seems to be a simultaneous playing-with and being-played-by, a particular dialectics of activity and passivity – which, as we will see, clearly resembles certain processes and dynamics that are also quite typical of the fashion world. Anyway, returning to *Oase des Glücks*, Fink continues by observing that playing

is always a confrontation with beings. In the plaything, the whole is concentrated in a single thing. Every instance of play is an attempt on the part of life, a vital experiment, which experiences in the plaything the epitome of resistant beings in general. [...] [W]e must distinguish between the real human being who “plays” and the human role within the instance of play. [...] In the enactment of play, there remains a knowledge, albeit strongly reduced, about [the player’s] double existence. It exists in two spheres [...]. This doubling belongs to the essence of playing. All the structural aspects touched on until now come together in the fundamental concept of the *playworld*. Every sort of playing is the magical production of a playworld. [...] The playworld is an imaginary dimension, whose ontological sense poses

³⁴ Fink 2016, pp. 15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 27.

³⁵ See Gadamer 1986, pp. 3-31, 123-130, and Gadamer 2004, pp. 102-119.

an obscure and difficult problem. We play in the so-called actual world but we thereby attain (*erspielen*) a realm, an enigmatic field, that is not nothing and yet is nothing actual. [...] [T]he imaginary character of the playworld cannot be explained as a phenomenon of a merely subjective appearance, nor determined to be a delusion that exists only within the interiority of a soul but in no way is found among and between things in general. The more one attempts to reflect on play, the more enigmatic and questionworthy it seems to become. [...] The relation of the human being to the enigmatic appearance of the playworld, to the dimension of the imaginary, is *ambiguous*. [...] The greatest questions and problems of philosophy are lodged in the most ordinary words and things. The concept of appearance is as obscure and unexplored as the concept of Being and both concepts belong together in an opaque, confusing, downright labyrinthine way, permeating one another in their interplay. [...] Play is creative bringing-forth, it is a production. The product is the playworld, a sphere of appearance, a field whose actuality is obviously not a very settled matter. And nevertheless the appearance of the playworld is not simply nothing. [...] The playworld contains [both] subjective elements of fantasy and objective, ontic elements. [...] Playing is finite creativity within the magical dimension of appearance. [...] Human play is (even if we no longer know it) the symbolic activity of bringing the sense of the world and life to presence.³⁶

As I said, Fink's concept of fashion must also be contextualized within his more general theory of the central role "played" by play (*Spiel*) in the whole of the human existence. This is confirmed by *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel*, where Fink employs the concept of play in a few strategic passages to explain what fashion really is in its very essence, i.e. not only from an anthropological but also from an ontological point of view concerning the *Seinsrang* or even *Seinssinn* of this phenomenon. As is well-known, the 20th century saw the development of a veritable tradition of a philosophy of play.³⁷ Let us simply think about the great relevance that the concept of play

³⁶ Fink 2016, pp. 23-26, 28-30.

³⁷ I borrow this concept from Matteucci 2004, p. 136.

acquired in such different thinkers as Huizinga, Caillois, Adorno, Gadamer, Marcuse, Plessner, Wittgenstein and still others (sometimes relying on insights whose original coinage can be traced back to Kant's notion of the free play of the faculties and/or to Schiller's concept of *Spieltrieb*, the "play-drive"). Fink's contribution, however, stands out in this context because of its greater systematicity and the somewhat unprecedented attention paid to play in comparison to other philosophical accounts of it, and still more because of its rigorous phenomenological-anthropological approach that eventually lead him to define play as a basic human phenomenon, as "an existential characteristic" – "existentials" or "existential characteristics" being in phenomenological philosophy, most noticeably in Heidegger's 1927 masterpiece *Being and Time*, the quintessential features of the human being as such.

This, as we will see, also has relevant consequences for his philosophical perspective on fashion. As a matter of fact, inasmuch as it belongs to the sphere of play that, in turn, is part of what Fink calls "the decisive fundamental phenomena of human existence", fashion proves to be extremely useful also from a philosophical point of view (quite unexpectedly, as it were, if one's reasoning is based, as has often happened in Western philosophy, on a prejudicial devaluation of what is merely playful and embodied, and thus not "serious" or purely intellectual and spiritual). Indeed, fashion proves to be a phenomenon that can allow us to better grasp some of the significant aspects of human existence already emphasized by Fink with regard to play. I refer, in particular, to some aspects that are of great relevance for philosophical aesthetics, such as the status of appearance (i.e. of what is apparent and seeming, imaginary and unreal, or better "real" in a peculiar, autonomous way), and then to the relevance of appearances for the life of a community or society (hence the question concerning social appearances),³⁸ and finally to the complex, polysemous, multidimensional and fundamentally ambiguous relation of the human being to his/her body and the world.

³⁸ On this topic, see for example Carnevali 2012 (especially chap. 1-4).

As we will see, Fink's capacity to provide a non-reductionist approach to fashion is remarkable – by which I mean to say, an approach that is able to avoid the reduction of such a complex phenomenon to a single and supposedly simple principle, aspect or element, and even to recognize fashion as a human activity whose “essence” consists in being one thing and at the same time the opposite (thus in an antinomical way, so to speak). When dealing with such complex cultural phenomena, it is important to grasp the complex, multifaceted, in-itself-articulated and sometimes even antinomical nature that is constitutive for them – as masterfully argued by Georg Simmel, for example, precisely with regard to fashion.³⁹ Indeed, this is probably one of the distinguishing features of an adequate theory of cultural practices like art, fashion etc., and this is one of the reasons why I suggest that Fink's conception of fashion is definitely worthy of being rediscovered today.

3. Fink's Philosophy of Fashion: A Text Analysis and Interpretation

Fink's book *Mode... ein verführerisches Spiel* consists of 7 chapters: 1) *Die magische Kräfte der Mode*; 2) *Das sozialphänomen der Mode*; 3) *Mode – der Wunsch immer anders zu sein*; 4) *Reiz und Leistung der Mode*; 5) *Die Mode hat viele Gesichter*; 6) *Führung und Verführung in der Mode*; 7) *Ist*

³⁹ Fashion is understood by Simmel as grounded at one and the same time on the twofold drive toward (both individual and collective) imitation and differentiation, or even as peculiarly suspended or oscillating between being and not-being. Fashion, for Simmel, “possesses the peculiar attraction of limitation, the attraction of a simultaneous beginning and end, the charm of newness and simultaneously of transitoriness”. Fashion is “imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation; it leads the individual onto the path that everyone travels, it furnishes a general condition that resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time, and to no less a degree, it satisfies the need for distinction, the tendency towards differentiation, change and individual contrast. [...] Hence fashion is nothing more than a particular instance among the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in a unified act the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and variation. [...] Connection and differentiation are the two fundamental functions which are here inseparably united, of which one of the two, although or because it forms a logical contrast to the other, becomes the condition of its realization” (Simmel 1997, pp. 188-192).

die Mode existenzberechtigt?. Should we want to basically group together the main contents of Fink's book and the distinctive features of his theory, following a thematic order without regard to the partition of the book and its exact articulation in various sections, we could probably begin our text analysis from the question concerning the particular nature of the human being – a question, the latter, that clearly presents several philosophical-anthropological echoes, so to speak, sometimes also reminiscent of Scheler, Heidegger, Plessner or Gehlen. In fact, Fink significantly defines the human being (or the person: in German, “*Der Mensch*”) as “a player (*Spieler*)”,⁴⁰ as a peculiar, odd animal that unites in itself nature and freedom, impulse and rationality: “a curious creature (*ein sonderbares Wesen*)” that “is condemned to self-organization and self-formation (*Selbstgestaltung*)”.⁴¹

It is in this context, as I said, that the fundamental significance of play for the human being and, arising from this, the “playful” character of fashion itself emerge. Fink is quite explicit on this point, and in fact he says that fashion relies on “the free play-impulse of the human being (*dem freien Spieltrieb des Menschen*)”. For him, “fashion belongs to the realm of freedom and play (*die Mode gehört zur Freiheit und zum Spiel*)” and, from this point of view, developing an adequate understanding of what fashion actually is represents “a cultural-pedagogical task of the first rank, in order to gain a self-comprehension of the human being as a player (*eine kulturpädagogische Aufgabe ersten Ranges, ein Selbstverständnis des Menschen als Spieler zu gewinnen*)”.⁴² This also leads Fink to understand fashion as belonging to the dimension of sociability (*Geselligkeit*) and free time or leisure (*freie Zeit; Freizeit*): a question, the latter, to which he dedicates many pages and remarks in his book.⁴³

⁴⁰ “The human being – as a player (*als Spieler*) – is close to fashion and all its phenomenical forms (*Erscheinungsformen*)” (Fink 1969, p. 40).

⁴¹ See also the insights and explanations on this aspect provided at pages 22-23, 53, 64 of Fink's book.

⁴² Fink 1969, pp. 90, 96, 113.

⁴³ On the general significance of sociability for human life, in general, and its connection to the domain of play, in particular, see Fink 1969, pp. 79-81, 85. Other observations variously dealing with fashion as essentially related to sociability can be found, for example, at pages 79, 81, 85, 86, 88, 93.

At the same time, insisting on the unique character of the human being (also, if not especially, in comparison to non-human animals), Fink stresses the latter's particular relationship to its own body and, connected to this, the central role played by dress precisely in its relationship to the body⁴⁴ (including, among other things, the fashion/sexuality relationship).⁴⁵ In doing so, i.e. in claiming that our existence is constitutively embodied, that we are world-open in an embodied way (*leibhaft*), that reality is bodily (*leiblich*) disclosed to us, and that the human body (*Menschenleib*) is not a thing but is rather the human being's effective reality (*Wirklichkeit*), Fink clearly relies on insights into the dual dimension of our bodily life – namely, into the dual way we can refer to our own body both as *Körper* (an objective body, i.e. a mere object, a thing among things examined from a third-person perspective) and as *Leib* (a lived body, the body of a living organism experienced from a first-person perspective) – that have characterized to a great extent the development of phenomenological philosophy.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ For Fink, “the human body always already shows, reveals (*der Menschenleib zeigt immer schon*) [...] and permeates at the same time clothing with its tendency to communication (*durchdringt dabei mit seiner Kommunikationstendenz auch die Kleidung*). [...] Fashion is a phenomenon that is essentially connected [...] to the human being's embodied nature, to our existence's being-incarnated (*ein Phänomen, das mit der Leiblichkeit des Menschen, mit der Inkarniertheit unserer Existenz [...] zusammenhängt*) (Fink 1969, pp. 50, 77).

⁴⁵ On this aspect, see Fink 1969, pp. 51-53, 69, 71.

⁴⁶ There are a few passages of Fink's book on this aspect whose relevance requires us to quote them directly in the original German version. Indeed, according to him we live “vom ersten bis zum letzten Atemzuge in der sinnlichen Welt, existieren wir leibhaft [...]. Sinnlich-sinnenhaft sind wir und durch unseren Leib aufgeschlossen dem mannigfaltigen Seienden [...]. Leibhaft sind wir weltoffen. Zur Leiblichkeit unseres Daseins können wir verschiedenartig uns verhalten. [...] Die leibhafte Daseinsweise des Menschen bekundet sich nicht nur in der sinnlichen Erfahrung. Eine Vielfalt von Lebensphänomene offenbart sich leiblich. [...]. Das Spiel ist in besonderer Weise leibgebunden und leibbeschwingt [...]. Die Leiblichkeit des Menschen durchgreift alle wesenhaften Lebensfelder [...]. Der Menschenleib ist kein Außenwerk unseres Lebens, kein Gehäuse, keine Wohnhöhle und kein Instrument für Geist und Freiheit – der Leib ist unsere erdhafte, irdische Wirklichkeit, wo Natur und Freiheit sich durchdringen”. And still: “Der Menschenleib ist jedoch kein Ding, dem ein anderes Ding nur angepaßt wird [...]. Der Leib ist die konkrete Wirklichkeit des Menschen selbst, [...] der alle seine wesentlichen Existenzstrukturen ‘ausdrückt’, nicht bloß in Worten und Taten, auch in Gebärden und Mimik, in Haltung und Gang – und nicht zuletzt auch in der Art, wie er sich kleidet, Geschmack beweist, ‘Kultur’ auch in dem

Once again, far from being irrelevant for the specific purposes of a philosophical inquiry into fashion, this conception rather proves to be essential, inasmuch as it also opens up the possibility of a general rethinking of the body/dress relationship.⁴⁷ In fact, clothes serve as a cover, as a protection for the human being, but also (if not in the first place) as a proximate, “close-to-the-body (*leibnahe*)” means of expression.⁴⁸ What emerges is thus a concept of dress, and in particular of fashionable dress, as a sort of “second lived body (*zweiter Leib*)”⁴⁹ for such particular creatures as human beings that – following a long and respected tradition including Uexküll, Scheler, Gehlen, Heidegger, Gadamer and finally McDowell⁵⁰ – are not merely embedded in a natural environment (*Umwelt*) like all other animals but are rather characterized by the possession of a “second nature” and thus live in a historical and cultural world (*Welt*).

Quite interestingly, in recent times somehow analogous observations on body and dress have been made by outstanding fashion theorists such as Joanne Entwistle and Malcom Barnard (without ever mentioning Fink, however). The former, in her influential study *The Fashioned Body*, also speaks of dress as a sort of extension of our embodied Self, i.e. as a sort of “second skin”.⁵¹ While Barnard, for his part, explicitly refers to Entwistle herself and still other theorists, and argues that fashion is “about the ‘fashioned’ body”, by which he understands “*not a natural [...] body*” but rather

a “produced” and therefore “cultured” body. This is partly because one of the meanings of fashion (as a verb) is “to make” or “to

Kulturding, das er auf dem Leibe trägt und durch welches der Leib selbst sich hindurchbekundet” (Fink 1969, pp. 24-26, 34).

⁴⁷ “Verhältnis von Kleid und Leib”, in Fink’s own words (Fink 1969, p. 102).

⁴⁸ See Fink 1969, p. 50.

⁴⁹ “Dress, and essentially fashionable dress, is almost a ‘second lived body’ (*das Kleid, wesentlich das modische Kleid, ist fast ein ‘zweiter Leib*’)” (Fink 1969, p. 69). In another passage of the book Fink even compares dress to the house of the human being (Fink 1969, p. 35).

⁵⁰ On this topic, let me remind the reader of Marino 2015 (chap. 1).

⁵¹ See Entwistle 2000. It is probably not by chance that Entwistle’s original account relies, among others, also on phenomenological insights into the significance of the bodily dimension for the constitution of our world-experience in general.

produce”, and partly because *there can be no simple, uncultured, natural body*. [...] Even when naked, the body is posed or held in certain ways, it makes gestures and it is thoroughly meaningful. To say that the fashioned body is always *a cultured body* is also to say that the fashioned body is *a meaningful body* [...]. This is because saying that fashion is meaningful is to say that *fashion is a cultural phenomenon*.⁵²

With regard to this, it must be emphasized that a decisive element in Fink’s conception is represented by the human capacity to assume a distanced position from natural impulses (especially those concerning natural attraction and seduction), to learn how to manage and control them, to establish a mediated relationship with them rather than immediately attempting to satisfy them, and finally to sublimate such impulses by means of cultural activities. It is precisely at this point that fashion comes into play, inasmuch as the latter is understood by Fink as a seductive game, as a “sphere-in-between (*Zwischensphäre*)” or a “field-in-between (*Zwischenfeld*)”: namely, as a space that is the result of the typically human process of sublimation of impulses but does not function as a means for the latter’s mere repression or suppression, but rather leads to their intensification and even exaggeration, although always in the context of culturally domesticated activities. From this point of view, fashion’s relation to natural impulses and seduction is not immediate and one-sided but rather complex and also ambiguous, as if it played with them and at the same time was played by them, in an inextricable intertwinement of activity and passivity. In more general terms, in Fink’s perspective fashion seems to share with human existence as such a fundamental ambiguity:⁵³ or better, it embodies the ambiguous character that is typical of the human being as both

⁵² Barnard 2007, p. 4 (my emphasis).

⁵³ “Dress has an ambivalent, equivocal and plurivalent expressive value (*Das Kleid hat einen ambivalenten, einen zwei- und mehrdeutigen Ausdruckswert*)“ (Fink 1969, p. 36). Fashionable dress is characterized by its “ambivalence, its ambiguity and its intrinsic opposite character (*Ambivalenz, Zweideutigkeit und Gegenwendigkeit*)” (Fink 1969, p. 55). “Fashion has many faces, its smiling gracefulness is more enigmatic than the smile of the Gioconda (*Die Mode hat viele Gesichter, ihre lächelnde Grazie ist rätselhafter als das Lächeln der Gioconda*)” (Fink 1969, p. 77).

a natural and a cultural being, it takes this ambiguity on, and it actually brings it to extremes. “The phenomenon of fashion is connected to change, instability, fleetingness (*Wechsel, Unbeständigkeit, Flüchtigkeit*)”,⁵⁴ and this may be understood as a reflection, as it were, of the unstable, uncertain, always transient character of human nature as such.⁵⁵

Now, it is clear that making fashion’s essentially ambiguous and multiform character fully explicit implies (as I have already hinted at before) a refusal to adopt a simplifying or reductionist approach to this phenomenon. It is thus not by accident that Fink’s conception shows a great complexity and what we may define as an eminently dialectical or, better still, antinomical character. This appears in the perhaps clearest way when Fink introduces (sometimes a little bit *en passant*, in fact) the idea of an intrinsic dialectic between opposite moments as relevant and indeed decisive for the definition of fashion:⁵⁶ struggle for eternity vs. transience;⁵⁷ naturalness vs. artificiality;⁵⁸ imitation vs. distinction; conformism vs. originality; assimilation to others vs. individualism;⁵⁹ public life vs. private life; dressing vs. undressing⁶⁰ (perhaps understandable as an example of the

⁵⁴ Fink 1969, p. 32.

⁵⁵ See, in particular, Fink 1969, pp. 111-113, where we read (again, quoting the text directly in German): “Die Mode treibt die Zweideutigkeit der Kulturdaten auf die Spitze [...]. Die Mode hat über solche Züge hinaus die exemplarische Bedeutung, ein irritierendes Phänomen zu sein für Werten und Denken. [...] In der Erscheinung der Mode floriert die Ambiguität der menschlichen Existenz – und in solcher Hinsicht hat die Mode einen besonderen philosophischen Rang, den Rang eines Schlüsselphänomens [...]. Die Mode [gehört] zu den zweideutigsten, sich in Spiegelungen brechenden Dingen, die in gegensätzlichen Attributen aufscheinen, und in denen Sein und Schein sich unaufhörlich mischen. [...] Das Modekleid ist dialektisch, verhüllende Entbergung einer schamlosen Schamhaftigkeit, Hochspannung des Triebes durch Verdeckung der unmittelbaren Triebziele, die Verklärung des Fleisches im Zaubermittel der Textilien. Ja auch die ganze Mode als Daseinsphänomen ist dialektisch, etwas, was weder durch einseitig positive noch einseitig negative Charaktere bestimmt ist; vielmehr als ein bewegtes Gegenspiel von Gegensätzen sich darstellt. Das ist der Reiz, den dieses merkwürdige und schillernde Phänomen auch für die Philosophie hat”.

⁵⁶ As to the definition of fashion, it is possible to find several statements in Fink’s book, for example at pages 31, 41, 49, 51, 61, 96, 106, 109.

⁵⁷ See Fink 1969, p. 33.

⁵⁸ See Fink 1969, pp. 62, 69-70.

⁵⁹ See Fink 1969, pp. 45-46.

⁶⁰ See Fink 1969, p. 105.

typical phenomenological relationship between concealment and manifestation). On a terminological level, this aspect emerges, for example, in the use of such concepts as *Gegenwirkung* or *Gegenwendigkeit* or *Gegensatzmotiv*.⁶¹ For Fink, the phenomenon of fashion (just like play, as I said) is multidimensional and complex, ambivalent and ambiguous, characterized by an intrinsic oppositional character: that is, neither determined by a one-sided positive character nor by a one-sided negative one, but rather presenting itself as a dialectical play made of antagonisms and contrasts.

This implicitly leads one to ask the question as to whether or not there is a particular aspect or dimension of fashion that may be taken as a privileged key to gain an adequate access to it. Fink's answer to this question, at least judging by a few important passages of his book, seems to be that such a privileged key is represented by what we may call the *aesthetic dimension*. This emerges in a quite clear way, for example, when he emphasizes the irreducibility of fashion to other dimensions of human existence, such as economics, ethics, politics, etc.⁶² Beside this, the question concerning the "peculiar aesthetic function of fashion (*eigentümliche ästhetische Funktion der Mode*)"⁶³ also emerges in connection to other problems. This is the case, for example, with regard to Fink's observations on the question of leadership or command (*Führung*) in fashion. A question, the latter, that he proposes to solve, as it were, by introducing the concept of

⁶¹ See Fink 1969, pp. 30, 53, 96-97.

⁶² In fact, as he explains in the very last pages of his book (also connecting back, at the end of his inquiry, the question of fashion to those of play and embodiment): "Sofern die Mode mit dem Existenzphänomen des Spiels und mit der Leibverklärung zusammenhängt, kann sie offenbar nicht bemessen werden nach Wertschätzungen aus anderen Daseinsbezirken, nicht kurz und bündig taxiert werden nach Maßstäben, die ihr fremd und äußerlich sind. [...] Gewiß werden Erscheinungen wie die Mode vielfach aus der Optik moralischer Lebensdeutung heraus bewertet, abgeschätzt, kritisch taxiert. Ob aber damit über den Seinsrang, über die ontologische Valenz und die anthropologische Bewandnis solcher Phänomene etwas gemacht ist, [...] kann weiterhin bezweifelt werden. [...] Die Mode ist weder 'nützlich' im ökonomischen Verstande [...]. Noch ist die Mode sittlich gut oder sittlich verwerflich, sie ist eine Sache 'jenseits von Gut und Böse'" (Fink 1969, pp. 109-110).

⁶³ Fink 1969, p. 70.

seduction (*Verführung*) as quintessential to understand what fashion really is and above all how it functions.⁶⁴

In fact, fashion's influence on us, its capacity to determine our taste and preferences, often extending its conditioning power to our lifestyle and our decisions in other dimensions of our life, does not derive for Fink from some kind of command or authoritative coercion; rather, it is the result of fashion's persuasive power deriving from its incomparable ability to play with seduction, with the human being's fundamental need to fascinate and at the same time be fascinated or seduced. And this persuasion and seduction power is precisely exercised by fashion with aesthetic means, i.e. thanks to its capacity to play in always new ways with forms and contents, materials and colors, in order to produce original works that may fascinate us and may be aesthetically appreciated and enjoyed by us. On this basis, Fink finally draws the quasi-ontological conclusion that fashion's essential way of being (*ihr Sein*), i.e. what it really *is*, is precisely "the seductive appearance (*das verführerische Scheinen*)".⁶⁵

These questions and quotations, in turn, contain a few other elements that are quite relevant for the specific purposes of the present contribution. First of all, even the simple use of such terms as *Schein* or *Verklärung* or *Phantasie* or *Illusion* immediately reminds us of the great role of "the seeming", i.e. of the domain of *appearances* in comparison to (or even in contrast to) that of being. A question, the latter, that we have already hinted at in the context of our discussion on play and that, as I said, is of decisive importance for phenomenological aesthetics as such.⁶⁶ Beside this, we also

⁶⁴ See Fink 1969, pp. 96-101.

⁶⁵ Fink 1969, p. 101.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Günter Figal's recent treatment of this subject in relation to art, in the context of his ambitious program of an aesthetics *as* phenomenology: "an artwork is essentially phenomenal; it is an appearance that is not to be taken as the appearance of something, but instead purely as appearance. Accordingly, aesthetics essentially is phenomenology; it must be phenomenology if it wishes to grasp that which can be aesthetically experienced, and grasp it by way of art in its clearest and most distinct shape. [...] Artworks are thing-like; it is only for this reason that perception is essentially connected to the experience of them. Yet artworks are things of a special sort – not things that can also be viewed as phenomena, but rather essentially phenomenal things, or conversely, phenomena that are essentially thing-like. Artworks are, in a word, appearing

find in Fink's book some significant references to the fashion industry that he understands, in turn, as a branch of what has been commonly defined "the culture industry" from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* onwards.⁶⁷ According to Fink, "the culture industry embraces in its whole width all phenomena that are originated by human freedom and the bodily-bound, limited creative power of human beings (*umspannt in ihrer vollen Breite alle Phänomene, die der menschlichen Freiheit, der leiblich-gebundenen, endlichen Schöpfungsmacht des Menschen entspringen*)", and "the fashion industry is a particular and particularly significant branch of the culture industry".⁶⁸ Quite interestingly, however, this does *not* lead Fink – contrary to many other philosophers, writers and intellectuals – to develop a concept of fashion (understood here as an industrial activity: more precisely, an industrial *and* aesthetic activity, without any insurmountable hiatus between these two dimensions) as authoritarian, dictatorial, antidemocratic, enslaving, etc. Rather, he is quite explicit in claiming that "fashion cannot be interpreted as a form of tyrannical power (*die Mode [kann] nicht als tyrannische Gewalt interpretiert werden*)", that fashion is "by no means a manipulation, certainly not a situation of coercion, nor a dictatorship (*keineswegs eine Manipulation, erst recht nicht eine Zwangssituation, keine Diktatur*)".⁶⁹

In my view, far from being an "integrated" intellectual opposed to the so-called "apocalyptic" ones,⁷⁰ by expressing this opinion on the non-authoritarian, or non-totalitarian, nature of the contemporary fashion system Fink simply appears as a reasonable thinker who does not exclude fashion's great power (that, as such, consequently requires great responsibility) in influencing our taste, our understanding, our choices, to some extent our general way of thinking and behaving, but for this reason does not conclude that in the so-called mass society individuals have been deprived of all their

things (*Erscheinungsdinge*) – thing-like appearances, things that are essentially made in order to appear. As appearing things, artworks are beautiful" (Figal 2015, pp. 3-4).

⁶⁷ See Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, pp. 94-136.

⁶⁸ Fink 1969, p. 95.

⁶⁹ Fink 1969, pp. 40, 46. See also Fink 1969, pp. 61, 88-89.

⁷⁰ I obviously borrow this conceptual pair from Umberto Eco's famous collection of essays on mass culture *Apocalyptic and Integrated*.

power, judgment, capacity to express preferences and make decisions, etc. Moreover, his opinion on this particular aspect also appears consistent with his general framework that, as it has been presented here, generally does not tend to involve simplified or, say, determinist patterns of explanation, but rather strives to do justice to the complexity and sometimes even “antinomicity” of cultural phenomena. In this perspective, it is not a matter of undervaluing the influence and power of certain institutions or practices, but rather of interpreting this power as limited and not as unlimited, pervasive or total. To put it plainly, the undeniable fact that everybody is influenced to some degree by fashion does not imply that everybody is a fashion victim!⁷¹ More than one century after Simmel’s seminal essay on

⁷¹ Of course, these observations can only apply (if they can, i.e. if one does not adopt what I called an “apocalyptic” perspective on the culture industry, mass culture etc.) to the privileged minority, as it were, of consumers of fashionable clothing in the Western countries. Needless to say, this does not apply to other subjects equally involved in the processes that the existence and ever-growing development of the fashion industry actually rest upon: namely, the underpaid and exploited workers in the Third World or the so-called underdeveloped countries where the vast majority of the clothes that we wear everyday are effectively manufactured and produced. Only these people, I would suggest, really (and unfortunately, of course) deserve to be called “fashion victims”; for them, it is surely appropriate to speak of the fashion industry as provided with an unlimited, pervasive and total power of coercion and even enslavement. That which, once again, may confirm the in-itself contradictory nature of the phenomenon of fashion (and other analogous cultural phenomena too). In fact, as has been noted, “although fashion can be used in liberating ways, it remains ambiguous. For fashion, the child of capitalism, has, like capitalism, a double face. [...] In more recent times capitalism has become global, imperialist and racist. At the economic level the fashion industry has been an important instrument of this exploitation, [...] it today exploits the labour of the developing countries, and that of women in particular. [...] Fashion *speaks* capitalism. Capitalism maims, kills, appropriates, lays waste. It also creates great wealth and beauty, together with a yearning for lives and opportunities that remain just beyond our reach. It manufactures dreams and images as well as things, and fashion is as much a part of the dream world of capitalism as of its economy. [...] Fashion is one of the most accessible and one of the most flexible means by which we express these ambiguities. Fashion is modernist irony” (Wilson 2003, pp. 13-15). Wilson also adds that “[w]e therefore both love and hate fashion, just as we love and hate capitalism itself” – however, I would cautiously suggest consideration of the fact that only the lucky few who are allowed, mostly in the middle and upper classes of the Western countries, to benefit from this situation, and therefore can (more or less) freely and consciously make use of the opportunities provided by the capitalist fashion industry, may perhaps subscribe to this view; what I have previously defined as the real fashion victims will surely be much more suspicious towards Wilson’s perspective and other analogous

fashion,⁷² despite all the relevant changes that have occurred since then in the fashion system (such as the transition from *haute couture* to *pret-à-porter*, or the upheaval of the top-down or trickle-down model and the advent of the bottom-up or trickle-up mechanism with so-called alternative, countercultural or street styles like punk, hip-hop, grunge, etc.), it still remains possible to place fashion “at the very periphery of the personality, which regards itself as a *pièce de résistance* to fashion”:

It is this significant aspect of fashion that is adopted by refined and special persons, in so far as they use it as a kind of mask. Thereby a triumph of the soul over the given nature of existence is achieved which, at least as far as form is concerned, must be considered one of the highest and finest victories [...]. As a whole, one could say that the most favourable result for the total value of life will be obtained when all unavoidable dependency is transferred more and more to the periphery of life, to its externalities. In this respect, fashion is also a social form of marvellous expediency, because, like the law, it affects only the externals of life, and hence only those sides of life which are turned towards society.⁷³

Fink seems to take adequately into account the (even conflicting or hostile, of course) dialectics between the individual and social institutions, and does not overemphasize the latter’s power. From this point of view, his contribution may be of great help today to remind us that cultural phenomena like fashion (among others, of course), beside their obvious power of inducing at various levels a tendency to conformism or even massification, are also (and, what matters most, at the same time) important means of self-expression, of construction and strengthening of one’s identity, of mutual recognition with others and thus of intersubjective relations, and last but not least, on a specifically aesthetic level, of definition

ones... Recent and insightful observations on this aspect of the fashion world are those presented by Sullivan 2017.

⁷² For an overall and complete interpretation of all versions of Simmel’s work on fashion (1895; 1905; 1911), see Matteucci 2015.

⁷³ Simmel 1997, pp. 198, 200.

and transformation of taste preferences and style. So, returning once more to the question of play, the goal is not that of excluding the influence of fashion on our life (which, by the way, would be a poor illusion, especially in our age) but rather of becoming acquainted with it, of freely and even joyfully playing with it.

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