

Philosophic-anthropological implications of fashion

PSEUDO-TRAGEDY

Unlike animals, man is a self-staging and self-reflecting being that is seeking for recognition. Fashionable clothes serve here as a requisite, since they support the staging of a person on the stage of everyday life and influence how a person is perceived by others ('spectators'). For people – especially at a first meeting – are governed by outward appearances, as KANT notes:

“The saying ‘clothes make the man’ holds to a certain extent even for intelligent people. To be sure, the Russian proverb says: ‘One receives the guest according to his clothes, and sees him to the door according to his understanding’. But understanding still cannot prevent the impression that a well-dressed person makes.”¹

An anthropological assumption of KANT is that a person likes to imitate his superiors and that fashion is a manifestation of this imitation: From his subjective-individual perspective man imitates ‘better’ people – role models – with the aid of fashion. In his poetics, ARISTOTLE assumes that tragedy seeks to imitate better people and that by sharing in the experience of the tragedy the spectator is granted *catharsis*.

In the following subchapters, man will be examined as a being that strives for recognition, that, in order to gain recognition, makes use of (imitative) staging and for this purpose gains assistance from fashionable clothing. Staging elements are suitable for human movements on the stage of so-

1 KANT 1988, 49 [AA 136-137] 2006, pp. 25–26

cial everyday life, with consumption activated for this self-dramatisation as well as the wearing of fashionable clothing being experienced as pleasant and self-enhancing by certain consumers. So the quintessential question is raised as to whether staging via fashion constitutes a *tragedy* and brings about a kind of *catharsis*. For – according to GOFFMAN – the “*issues that drama and stage technique deal with are often trivial, but they are universal – they obviously appear everywhere in social life.*”²

The striving for recognition on the everyday stage

It would appear that man cannot permanently be a ‘solivagus’³ but needs his fellow humans in an essential and existential way. He moves primarily within groups, which means that human reality is constantly social.⁴ Without a human counterpart, man can only feel an affiliation with nature and a belief. According to Eugen Fink “*Man [is] the greatest stimulus for his fellow-man. [...] He is stimulated by his fellow-man – more than anything else. [...] he essentially lives in co-existence with his fellow-men.*”⁵ Apart from the need for belonging, MASLOW also mentions the need for intimacy and love.⁶ The evidence of this ‘anthropological constant’ (to love and be loved) is constantly confirmed not only since the beginnings of literature and poetry but also in the personal feelings of every individual.

Corporations supplying consumer items also advertise for products (e.g. chocolate or cat food) by means of which the consumer – along with the products – can acquire, give and consume love almost instantaneously as meta-goods. Man does not only need company and the love of particular

2 GOFFMAN 2001, 18

3 solivagus = wandering around alone, isolated

4 Cf. KOJÈVE 1996, 23

5 FINK 1969, 63-64,

6 Cf. MASLOW 1999 and KLEBER 1996, 4-6. It should be noted that MASLOW – whose theory of the structure of needs is often regarded as being too rigid – immediately after explaining the hierarchy of human needs immediately relativises it: “*Up to this point, it would seem in our descriptions as if the hierarchy of basic needs was a fixed order – it is, however, not nearly as rigid as we have implied.*” MASLOW 1997, 79

people, however,⁷ but wants in addition to be *important* for these people, or to be recognised by them – for (certain) other people he wants to *play a role*, and in the truest sense of the word. MASLOW describes this anthropological implication in *motivation* and *personality* as the need for *recognition and self-esteem*.⁸ For recognition, being seen by other people is a necessary condition (which, trivially enough, cannot be realised without a counterpart); enjoying prestige is one of the sources of personal self-esteem.⁹ According to HEGEL (KOJÈVE), “*the real and true human being is the result of its interaction with others*”.¹⁰

According to KOJÈVE’s interpretation of HEGEL’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the desire of one person desires the *desire* of the other, and not only the other person *without* his desire. He also wants to be desired and thereby recognised by the other person; “*every human, anthropogenic desire that produces self-consciousness, human reality is ultimately a function of the desire for recognition. [...] Being a human being is actually only a dependent function of a desire directed towards another desire, i.e. – ultimately – a desire for recognition.*”¹¹ This recognition¹² is a *conditio sine qua non* for being a human being:

“A human being is only really human as one that is ‘recognised’ by another human being, by other persons and – ultimately – all other persons: for itself just as well as for the others. So a human being, in order to be really and truly a ‘human’ and to

7 Temporarily or in phases, at least. [The German term used is ‘Ansehen’ (= how one is seen by others). Much use is made in the original of the verb ‘to see’. This can unfortunately not be retained in the English translation. Translator’s note]

8 Cf. MASLOW 1999, 62-87

9 Being recognised is to be understood in a metaphorical sense. BEETHOVEN, via his auditive perceived music still enjoys considerable recognition, even when one does not have him or the concert musicians ‘before one’s eyes’. Blind people ‘see’ their counterpart with their remaining four senses.

10 KOJÈVE 1996, 33

11 Cf. KOJÈVE 1996, 23

12 KOJÈVE 1996, 24-25

know itself as such, must impose the idea it has of itself on others: it must be granted recognition by others (in the ideal borderline case from all others).”¹³

It is easy to see the extent to which such human motivators as prestige, recognition and self-esteem are seized on by the advertising industry. The advertising slogan used for many years by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “*Behind this newspaper there’s always a clever head*” not only indicates that this advertisement is aiming at the need for prestige, recognition and a feeling of self-esteem in the reader (oneself as a clever head behind a newspaper produced by and for clever heads) but also that it is assumed from the pages of the newspaper that even intellectuals – or people that would like to be such – are impressed by this assertion.¹⁴ Whoever holds this newspaper in front of him – including an idiot – is by definition now a clever head. The motivators prestige, recognition, self-esteem and affiliation, love are responsible for a not inconsiderable part of human attitudes and actions – also for consumer goods, which make use in their advertising of the motivators mentioned as meta-goods. Empirical evidence for the motivators mentioned is plentiful.¹⁵ A person gains prestige and a feeling of belonging by imitating models and by staging. This is the theme of the following section.

Staging and *imitatio prominentis*

I love acting. It is so much more real than life.¹⁶

By and large, the more civilised people are, the more they are actors.¹⁷

In order to improve their prestige in the eyes of others, people stage themselves. Self-dramatisation is a necessary anthropological element of social

13 KOJÈVE 1996, 27 u. 29

14 Cf. MEINHOLD 2001, 60

15 Cf. DEUTSCHE SHELL 2000, 65

16 Lord HENRY in: WILDE: *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, chap. 6.

17 KANT 1998, 67 (I, 1, § 14; AA 7, 151)

life.¹⁸ With their stimuli “*people act ‘society’ with each other and for each other*”.¹⁹ In this connection, fashion functions as more than just a useful ‘requisite’:

“A person’s self-presentation in society, his self-assertion – internal as well as external – but also his ordering in terms of rank and his competitive desire to stand apart from his neighbour are – ever since people have lived in societies, i.e. from time immemorial – to an astonishing extent dependent on the mysterious power that we give the simple name of fashion.”²⁰

Self-dramatisation with the aid of fashion gets its orientation from models and seeks to find an image that the performer wishes to present to fellow human beings. “*So the glass [the mirror] does not even reflect what he himself wants but how he is wanted by others*”²¹ – according to BLOCH. PLESSNER also assumes “*that the ‘self-control’ which the daily life of a human being calls for, the control of the role which he plays in it, the ability to transform and to pretend which social contact and profession more or less impose on one, are directed by the presenter towards the image he wishes to have for the onlooker.*”²²

Consequently, a person seeks to establish the role that he has to fill in the eyes of those from whom he would like to gain recognition. He acts a part for others and for himself that does not completely agree with his own individual nature but which presents a staged version of himself or of his human nature.²³ And since a person – “*by nature an actor [...] and a friend of appearances*”²⁴ – desires to be recognised by the other person, he makes use of methods such as the clothing or disguising of his outer appearance, in order to present himself as desirable.

For KANT the playing of roles, the staged self-presentation of a person in life, amounts to a cultural achievement that makes its contribution to the

18 Cf. DAHRENDORF 1969, VII-VIII und PLESSNER 1984, especially 411-412

19 FINK 1969, 65

20 KÖNIG 1971, 18

21 BLOCH 1998, 396

22 PLESSNER 1982, 407

23 dealt with in detail in PLESSNER 1985; see below.

24 FINK 1969, 99;

amelioration of the morality of the role-player: “*For by people playing these roles will gradually really awaken the virtues that they have artificially presented for a considerable time, and these will become part of their disposition.*”²⁵

Does appearance determine being, or being appearance? The Parisian fashion designer Maggy ROUFF opined that the soul influences the outer ‘wrapping’.²⁶ In everyday life it is certainly to assume that there is basically a mutual interaction between being and appearance, one that is presented by BAUDRILLARD in his *simulacra* theory as ‘hyperreality’.²⁷ According to this, everyday human actions – which constantly move between the poles of being and appearance – are already a form of hyperreality, since a person’s real being always fuses or merges with his presented being. This is also postulated by PLESSNER, who assumes a constant disparity between human nature and (more or less staged) social role.

As can be deduced from this, the virtuous orientation of attitude and action in stoic philosophy must lead, in a consistent or even compulsive form, to the complete acceptance of the social role. And this will involve the excision of the own self – something that would have been seen as pathological, seen from Cynical, Cyraenian and Epicurean positions. For from the first-mentioned perspective *being* has to become what being *ought* to become. According to the Stoic virtue ethic, the social role ought not to be appearance, but being must fill out this role as perfectly as possible and even do so with conviction – *appearance should become being*.

MONTAIGNE examines this disparity between being and appearance, between social role and individual human nature, finding a possible solution in the self-observation of the individual as a spectator: the soul is not to play its role for the purpose of display but for the acting person himself, who is also capable of assuming the perspective of observer towards him-

25 KANT 1998, 67 (I, 1, § 14; AA 7, 151)

26 ROUFF 1942, 175

27 BAUDRILLARD 1982, 119. BAUDRILLARD intention was to radicalise prominent theses and to use them against themselves. Cf. BAUDRILLARD 1984, 12 and 315

self.²⁸ ROUSSEAU also criticises the person who plays various roles and the ‘dual nature’ that results from this.²⁹

PLESSNER in his essay *Social Role and Human Nature* (1960) deals with the disparity and the area of tension between social roles and human nature; he describes the

“relationship between human nature and its social existence” [is] “a structure of doubles, in which the role-bearer and role-figure are interconnected”. “Via the role which he plays above all as the bearer of a rank in office and profession, modern man has his status, represents something. [...] next to a more or less nebulous private existence, everyone cuts – as well as he is able – a public figure [or] several [...]”.³⁰

PLESSNER’s anthropological concept of the role has in mind the “*relationship between the role-bearer and his role*” and it notes “*the dual nature of the private and public individual*”³¹ as an inalienable, inevitable fact. He thus distinguishes himself from MARX, according to whom

“a person must become identical with himself, because he has once been so and with this basic figure of coincidence between inner and outer possesses the prerequisite of a spiritual-moral freedom. [...] It is a question of capturing and humanising this concrete force – a second, as yet uncontrolled nature – which, because of its industrial reorganisation, alienates the person from himself and robs him of his self-esteem by exposing him to ever new threats to his inherited way of life.”³²

Against this conception PLESSNER sets man in his dual nature: for him, externalisation does not involve “*any alienation of the self but – under the present-day conditions of a highly differentiated working world, for example, which the sociological functional analysis of a society more or less corresponds to – the chance of being completely himself.*”³³ But the chance to

28 Cf. MONTAIGNE 1988, II, 17, 2, 647 and II, 16, 2, 623f

29 ROUSSEAU 1962, 186f and 1761. The term ‘dual nature’ is an expression of PLESSNER’s, see below.

30 all quotes PLESSNER 1985, 231, 234, 235

31 Both quotations are from PLESSNER 1985, 232

32 PLESSNER 1985, 236

33 PLESSNER 1985, 237

completely become oneself via externalisation would seem to be an ideal-typical conception compared with the real life-challenges that man is faced with among the conditions mentioned by PLESSNER. For this chance cannot fully be exploited in many instances of everyday life: a person is rarely completely himself in the course of his strongly monetary-oriented career but is frequently used as the means to an end by other people; that is why MARX is not completely wrong.

According to PLESSNER, “*man first [becomes] himself in his duality as a role figure that can be experienced by himself.*”³⁴ This statement mentions an anthropological constant: Only in playing roles that display a disparity with his individual human nature does man first truly exist: only through this disparity does a human being become a human being.³⁵

According to the Stoics, a human has entirely to be a social role; according to MARX the being of a human is concealed *behind* the person he pretends to be. This essential quality displays itself when he abandons this acted role and takes off its mask: that which is behind the role and the mask is the true man, that is the essence of the man, this is where he must go if he is to realise himself. PLESSNER’s synthesis, on the other hand, argues that duality and disparity form an inseparable unity is the actual essence of the human being.

But human nature is faced not only by *one* role, PLESSNER mentions in passing – every individual plays a multiplicity of roles and not infrequently finds himself in conflicting roles.³⁶ Often enough, the acted role collides with personal expectations (intra-role conflict), or with other real roles of a person (inter-role conflict). Switching from one role into another one can – according to the nature of the role – cause human nature to lose balance. Here it is necessary to transfer the Aristotelian virtue theory of the individual ‘golden’ mean – according to which every person has to find *his own* individually mediated mean between extremes – to the *mediation* of the re-

34 PLESSNER 1985, 238

35 This view of PLESSNER’s, however, is not unproblematic: On the basis of this *anthropological* role concept the question could be asked whether, for example, mentally retarded or babies (are able to) ‘play a role’ or whether they *are* wholly human nature and thus – if one pursues this plessneresque view to its radical, logical conclusion – are not human beings at all?

36 Cf. MERTON 1957

quirements of the roles. The individual as owner of various roles and his own nature can get to know his own golden mean between these extremes, so that taking over a role for a certain length of time does not represent acting a different character but simply an accentuation of his own mean or nature – his nature is not ‘violated’.³⁷ This own golden mean between the extremes of individual nature and diverse roles is variable and never an ideal position in which a person ought to feel at ease and one that does not fundamentally contravene role content.

SIMMEL deals with this issue of the discrepancy between the acting role and the artistic temperament in his essay *On the Philosophy of the Actor* (1908):

“how an actor is to perceive a role does not arise – not even as an ideal requirement – from the role itself but from the relationship of his artistic temperament to the role. [...] There is not simply on the one hand an objective assignment laid down by the author and on the other a real, acting subjectivity, so that it is merely a question of shaping the latter to fit the former; above both of these things there is a third: the requirement that this role makes of the actor, the particular law that comes to the acting personality from this role.”³⁸

The conception of the role of the actor – which at first glance would seem to contravene the stoic ethic of virtue and the Kantian categorical imperative³⁹ – can be transferred to the social role: A general law (or a custom) that defines roles experiences different forms according to the individual: the acceptance and care of her own child is expected of every mother, just as a corresponding acceptance and good shaping of the role is expected of the actor; but just *how* mothers and actors shape their roles depends on the actual person playing the role and it can be judged as dramatically brilliant (in the case of the actor) or ethically and pedagogically valuable (in the case of the mother) despite being shaped in different ways.

The practical conversion of the synthesis of social roles and individual human nature remains problematic, and it cannot even theoretically be ide-

37 A further problem area of this topos probably lies in the various *definitions* of man’s essential *being* and in the resulting conceptions of the human *telos*.

38 SIMMEL 1997, 424-425

39 Cf. also Georg SIMMEL (1968) *Das individuelle Gesetz* (174-230)

ally resolved. Seeking one's golden mean between named extremes is similar to juggling with balls corresponding to the number of roles plus one ball – to push the image even further – that can never leave one's hands: one's own human nature.

The aim of the previous passage was to ground the playing of roles in the social theatre as an anthropological fact and to uncover the linked problem of the disparity between social roles and human nature. Obviously, fashionable consumer products – especially clothes – make a significant contribution to the shaping of social roles and are thus inevitably involved in this 'anthropological' dilemma.

The *presentation* and *staging* of people with the aid of *consumer items* is regarded by critics of consumption – from an individual-ethical perspective – as particularly criticisable, since the fear is that the exhibition value of life could possibly take the place of essential elements of life itself.⁴⁰ Self-awareness could give way to market-awareness, with the motto: "*Facade has replaced the soul*".⁴¹ Due to lifestyles which are closely related to consumption, it is fearfully assumed that young people's immaterial values in particular might be suppressed by material ones and feelings of self-esteem be replaced by brand-esteem.⁴² Clothing is a kind of rhetoric of the body; how one is perceived by others exerts an influence or even 'corrective effect' on a person (and this thesis can be applied to consumer products in general).

In the following, an option of behaviour will be singled out for closer examination that is very much in the foreground regarding staging: imitation.

40 Cf. FAURSCHOU 1990, 257f

41 POSCHARDT 2001, 4

42 Cf. MEINHOLD 2001, 60; REISCH 2001, 11

Man as an imitative being – Fashion as staged imitation

The human being has a natural tendency to compare his behaviour to that of a more important person (the child with adults, the lower-ranking person with those of higher rank) in order to imitate the other persons' ways.⁴³

*“An imitative creature is man”*⁴⁴ The ‘inclination to imitate’ is an anthropological constant that cannot be removed from man. In ARISTOTLE’s opinion, imitation (mimesis) is *“innate in man”*, for man is *“capable of imitation to an exceptional extent”* and he acquires *“his first knowledge through imitation”*. A further incentive for imitation is *“the joy that everyone obtains from imitation”*.⁴⁵ Anyone watching young children grow up will be able to confirm the obviousness of this assumption.

The ‘urge to imitate’ is assumed by some to be the anthropological datum that is responsible for the emergence and maintenance of fashion:⁴⁶

*“The original urge to imitate, which also biologically governs the human herd, although it can be sublimated and varied by means of human freedom, is the element of ‘fashion’.”*⁴⁷ We intend only to deal with imitation to the extent that it can be seen as a constituent of staging in everyday life – especially with the aid of fashionable clothes.

Within staging via fashion both conscious, intentionally forced imitation and unconscious, partially even undesired imitation play a role. The conscious buying and wearing of certain articles of clothing for a particular occasion is the desired imitation of a socially established pattern of atti-

43 KANT 1998, 184 (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, CUP 2006, p. 142).

44 SCHILLER 1983, 178 (Statement by WALLENSTEIN, III, 4, line 1,434)

45 All quotations from ARISTOTLE: *Poetics* 1448 b 4-9; According to ARISTOTLE imitation is responsible for the emergence of creative writing.

46 Implicitly, the need to imitate is, for example, concealed behind the wish to consume the same or similar consumer goods or brands as friends and acquaintances.

47 FINK 1969, 46

tudes and actions that the person classifies as meaningful. Behind the buying and wearing of certain articles of clothing for not apparently rational reasons on the other hand, unconscious and perhaps undesired imitation may be concealed that can be motivated for various, e.g. compensatory reasons, such as wishes for social contact, increased self-esteem, self-realisation – or in general the wish to cope with failure.⁴⁸

Research in comparative religion and history of religion by Mircea ELIADE verify manifestations of imitation in the realm of the sacred. In the religious form of imitation, the individual, by means of periodically recurring rituals, experiences time cyclically, satisfying an ontological longing for the perfection of man and the beginning of human history.⁴⁹ Via the imitation of mythical figures, especially the gods: “*imitatio dei*”⁵⁰, in sacral rituals, man participates in the transcendental. Similarly, the purchasing of certain consumer items, which are marketed with the aid of prominent persons, allows the consumer to participate in the lifestyle of such people. The mythical imitation not only gives the religious person a hold on his everyday life but also places this life in a cosmological context.⁵¹ Even the imitation of non-mythical or perhaps ‘everyday mythical’ figures (prominent people such as models, pop stars and film stars) apparently gives a person a hold on his everyday life – fashion, too, recurs cyclically like sacred rituals in a modified form. Some suppliers of fashionable consumer items have noted a religious deficit and marketed their products accordingly.⁵² “*The profanation of the sacred and the symbolisation of the profane characterise modern everyday life.*”⁵³

Via a similar sacred shaping the appearance of prominent figures in advertising becomes a pseudo-theophany: the earthly appearance of a godhead that serves as a model which is to be imitated via the displayed consumer products. Prominent persons are, for example, clad in white or black clothes that resemble liturgical garments and photographed in contemplative, meditative, statuesque or ecstatic attitudes or positions in front of cor-

48 Cf. MEINHOLD 2001, 78

49 Cf. ELIADE 1957, 54-55; 62-63

50 ELIADE 1957, 59 (imitation of the gods and their actions)

51 Cf. ELIADE 1957, 50-53

52 Cf. SELLMANN/ISENBERG 2000, 7-12

53 GRÄTZEL 1997, 105

responding backgrounds (mist, crystals, religious-looking buildings).⁵⁴ The sacred becomes a meta-good. By linking a consumer item (e.g. perfume) with its meta-goods, the quasi-divine appearance (prominence) and the brand name (symbol, signature, etc.) the ephemeral (fleeting) appearance of the divine, the (pseudo-)theophany becomes a hierophany: the constant experience of the sacred in the symbol. In such advertising, the brand name moves into the foreground as a symbol of a quasi-divine appearance. The brand name and the meta-goods connected with it are linked to the consumer item and can apparently be acquired when buying it. This *imitatio prominentis*⁵⁵ on the part of the consumer, i.e. the *imitation of the one who stands out from the crowd*, the prominent figure, offers a potential satisfaction of the overall needs mentioned by MASLOW (Self-realisation, prestige, increase in self-esteem, affiliation, love, security); by means of the *imitatio prominentis*, a lifestyle – a style of consumption – is apparently transformed into a style of living: the consumer consumes according to his model and believes that he thereby gives his life style.

When considering imitation with the aid of fashion, three variants that motivate staging are of interest for our inquiry. The imitation occurs both consciously and unconsciously:⁵⁶

(1) GARVE and SIMMEL talk of the fleeing of human individuality into the “*disguising levelling of fashion*”⁵⁷. Individuality is to be preserved precisely in a changing surface that gets increasingly adapted to the prevailing fashion. Imitation via clothing merely serves as camouflage, or more exactly: as a chameleon-like protective shield in order to preserve the inner, individual nature and in this case actually only refers to the ‘wrappings’ and not to ‘that which is enveloped’, which ought to ‘de-velop’ unhampered, independently of and with the aid of the protective wrapping.⁵⁸

54 Wolfgang JOOP, clad in white, ‘stands’ statuesquely in contrapposto position on the surface of the water in a swimming pool: Cf. max 23/2001

55 The concept has been borrowed from the technical term from religious studies ‘*imitatio dei*’, approximately as used e.g. by Mircea ELIADE.

56 A precise investigation and differentiation must be left to empirical psychology or motivational research of consumption.

57 SIMMEL 2000, 26

58 GARVE was the first to name this phenomenon: Cf. GARVE 1987, 94

(2) A second variant is the more or less conscious ‘copy’ of a fashionably exemplary ‘outfit’, a pattern of attitudes and actions that is perceived as being worth imitating, because one promises oneself a particular usefulness from it: “*Many people endeavour to resemble someone whom they feel is excellent, because they hope thereby to increase their own worth.*”⁵⁹ Historically speaking, this begins with the imitation of the costume or fashion of the upper classes, who are copied as far as possible by the lower classes and it does not end with adults who by means of youthful outfits seem to imitate representatives of younger generations. They are “*imitative adaptations informative of a particular style of living, [...] under the sign of an emulation of a model [...] Here the individual gains direction and form from a model. He models himself on him.*”⁶⁰ This second, relatively popular motif of imitation is mentioned from GARVE and KANT via VISCHER up to BAUDRILLARD – all of whom are interested in fashion from a philosophical point of view. This form of imitation possibly serves self-realisation, but above all gives the imitator (self-)assuredness, because he looks like the person who is more ‘successful’, ‘distinguished’, ‘beautiful’ or ‘young’; it creates (apparent) affiliation and raises prestige.

(3) In particular, self-realisation – followed by the other general motifs mentioned by MASLOW – is reflected in a third, artistic-creative variant of fashionable new creation via imitation. This form of imitation is often found in haute couture designs. Here elements are often imitated that come from outside the realms of fashion and then can subsequently become fashion. Examples of this are designs by artists (like Bazon BROCK), as well as the representatives of haute couture or queer figures that artistically stage their own appearance. The patterns of a football, cowhide or tree-bark etc. serve as design patterns for handbags, headwear or fabrics. This phenomenon – imitation of models that exist outside fashion inside fashion – is even partially recognisable from the named used: tulip skirt, melon, as well as in the name that is used for fashionable colouring of clothes – from ivory white via apricot, petrol, sand and slate to nighttime black.

Since fashion is mainly being regarded here as a mass phenomenon, the second aspect of staging imitation is of primary interest. In the following, this aspect will be singled out, analysed more closely and connected with

59 GARVE 1987, 9

60 PLESSNER 1982, 416

the Aristotelian theory of tragedy and the catharsis that results from it. At the same time, it will be checked in the following three sections whether the fashion of the masses contains tragedy-like elements and whether its consumption can bring about a kind of catharsis.

Fashion as pseudo-tragedy

[...] via fashion, this play-acting without content, people alternately reciprocally display their power to cause the insignificant to be significant; in this way it seems to be the classic case of the act of signifying [...]. In that way it became the sign of what 'really' constitutes a human being.⁶¹

If fashion is a kind of tragedy, the possibility exists that – like classical tragedy – it has cathartic properties, which in turn would help explain its popularity. In this section, fashion is interpreted as a pseudo-tragedy.

It certainly ought to be easier to show that the third variant of imitative staging – that of artistic innovation and the presentation of fashion – is a tragedy, since parallels can be drawn here without any great difficulty: the catwalk of the fashion show is similar to the stage of the theatre; the newly presented and staged fashion styles can not only be compared with the costumes out of the theatre props but also with the characters played by the protagonists – for it is not the presenter of the new fashion (the model) who has the important role in the staging on the catwalk of the fashion show but the main roles belong to the fashionable clothes staged by the models. In clothes worn for display purposes models are staging an elevated social environment – that of *haute couture*. It is from here the ultra-rich gain inspiration and occasionally also buy. Those who belong to this elevated environment, for their part, imitate the young, beautiful models on show by wearing the clothes of these models and enacting the presentation of beauty and youth that supports or accompanies their elevation. As with the dandy a mutual, alternating influencing of (apparently) elevated subject and society takes place; both parties observe, influence and presuppose each other.

61 BARTHES 1995, 294

Those watching fashion shows are similar to the theatre audience, and a combination of new fashionable clothing with its wearer is similar to the role and its actor. Just as the models of the actors are (real) persons from history or literature and mythology, the fashion models have elevated society as their model. In both instances, the imitation – as described above – is reversed: (real) persons from society imitate their models, whether it be prominent people such as fashion models, actors, sports folk, politicians or less well-known personal models.

Even artistic aspects link the putting on ‘stage’ in both worlds. On the stage of the theatre there are many artistic elements (action, stage image, contributions to do with costumes, masks, music, acting, etc). In the fashion show there are identical and similar elements to be found. Music as a Dionysian and fashion design as an Apollonian element merge during the fashion show – staging without music is unthinkable here. Thus, a fashion show alloys two important elements of tragedy – in the sense of Friedrich NIETZSCHE’s conception of tragedy – just as Attic tragedy arose from the synthesis between the Apollonian and the Dionysian.⁶²

The tragic element is not immediately apparent, in either *haute couture*, *prêt-à-porter* or mass fashion. Before seeking it, we need to undertake a comparison between the appearance of mass fashion on the one hand and of tragedy on the other. The following is now postulated: The fashion of the masses is (also) a pseudo-tragedy. Mass fashion creates *apparent* catharsis (and, indeed, without this having been expressly wished for or consciously perceived by anyone).

Before fashion reached the masses, vertical social migration was less possible and frequent than in the 20th and 21st centuries. Bound up with social status was the firmly regulated use of costumes to indicate rank. Everyone played out her social role in the clothes that corresponded to that role. Nowadays, the

“major forms of social intercourse [...] with their ‘receptions’ and their ‘parties’ always [have] a more or less a ‘masked ball’ touch to them, with ‘appearances’, ‘stagings’, great poses, self-presentations, a ‘theatre of passions and vanities’ [...]. Fashion

62 Cf. NIETZSCHE 1976, 383

ion has preferred locations for its appearances within the framework of 'social intercourse', at large 'social functions' – very much within the sphere of leisure."⁶³

If one observes a fashion customer during the act of buying, this staging for an audience or for a mirror, as a replacement of an audience, can already be seen in the first stages of fashion consumption. The consumer stages an everyday situation by passing or approaching a mirror while trying out a potential new item of clothing, or asking for approval and advice from a acquaintance person. The consumer is the performer in this short 'act'. Those accompanying the consumer, the sales staff and the consumer herself – via the mirror – represent the audience – the department store functions as the stage. Once the consumer leaves the store wearing the new item of clothing, the street becomes the stage, the passers-by become more or less interested spectators – and the consumer becomes his/her own spectator in the reflection of the display windows: should the consumer not feel sufficiently admired, self-admiration is always possible. Just as the most important reward an enthusiastic actor can have is applause, the consumer also secretly longs for applause, i.e. the kindly approval of the new item of clothing by other people, especially those on whom a personal high value is placed. The consumer is seldom pleased with the new item personally if it is not considered to be 'lovely' by others. A vivid example of such behaviour is to be found in ANDERSEN's *The Emperor's New Clothes* (19th century): The emperor, presenting and staging himself before his people in his 'new garments', does not dare say – just like everyone else – that he cannot see the 'clothes' at all – for, according to the assertion of the tailor, "*clothes made of this cloth had a wonderful way of becoming invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office, or who was unusually stupid.*"⁶⁴ The emperor therefore finds his clothes magnificent, because on the one hand he hopes that he is not unfit for his office or will at least be able to disguise the fact from his subjects via his staging. On the other hand, these clothes are also said to be wonderful by others who as well suspect that they might be unfit for their offices. When a small child suddenly cries: "*But he hasn't got any-*

63 FINK 1969, 85-86;

64 http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html

thing on!”⁶⁵, the emperor in his new putatively magnificent garments (but actually only clad in air) feels distinctly uneasy.

Eugen FINK expresses “*understanding for the help people gain from the fashion industry to portray ‘themselves’, to ‘objectivise’ their personalities and to ‘present’ themselves in an attractive manner to others.*”⁶⁶ Self-presentation and self-staging are possible with the aid of fashion. With clothing that corresponds, a person can feel better able to present himself or herself to others as an object. At the same time, though, clothing is always also a *disguise* by means of which the subject can feign something apparently objective: “*but the intellect is unable to prevent the impression of dark ideas of a certain importance that a well-dressed person makes, but can only at most firmly intend to correct afterwards the provisional judgment passed.*”⁶⁷

I would, however, question whether the individual is able to objectivise his personality by means of particular clothes. FINK sees in fashion the chance of “*paths and forms of individual expression and of a personal self-presentation also on the basis of an already ‘created’ fashion.*” The personal movement and contribution would then lie “*in placing the emphasizing accent in contemporary fashion and taste in an unmistakable way*”. According to him, wearing fashionable clothing is a “*sign of a personality culture that [testifies to] a spiritual individuality*”.⁶⁸ FINK is not completely wrong: wearing fashionable clothing *can* be a sign of a personality culture – but this does not necessarily have to be the case. Think, for example, of the person who uses fashionable clothing as a chameleon-like camouflage of his spiritual individuality. The question is to what extent FINK is speaking in the sense of his friend the textile manufacturer and financing publisher Walter SPENGLER. Roland BARTHES remains more critical: “*The woman of fashion is a collection of individual characteristics, which are distinguished apparently similarly to the ‘role compartments’ of classical drama. The analogy is not even repeated all that much, as the woman of fashion is ‘staged’ to such an extent [...].*”⁶⁹

65 Ibid.

66 FINK 1969, 88

67 KANT 1998, 49 [AA 136-137]

68 All quotations: FINK 1969, 89

69 BARTHES 1995, 260

Attributes that fashion lends its wearer seem to BARTHES to be assembled and put on. Advertising for consumer items makes use of the opportunity to richly provide products and product stagings with attributes – those I have referred to as ‘meta-goods’: “*Advertising strategists [...] link their objects with stimuli that, it has been empirically demonstrated, evoke a positive emotional reaction [...]. Insurances prefer images that convey warmth and security; breweries show cheerful and content young people.*”⁷⁰

This leads as far as to the stimulation of events, actions and characteristics that lie beyond reality in the sphere of ‘everyday mythology’. Attributes can be freely chosen and simulate utopian *Elysiums*; fashion advertising in particular promises

“the illusion of a quasi unending richness of the person [...]. Personality here is a composite one, although in no way complex; individualisation of the person in fashion is dependent on the number of elements brought into play and in addition on their apparently contrasting nature (wherever this is possible). Soft and proud, strict and gentle, correct and casual [...]”⁷¹

Behind such simulated patchwork personalities a personality-variability-option is concealed that could actually be considered to be multiple schizophrenia. “[...] *the woman in fashion is seen at one and the same time dreaming of being herself and someone else [...]*”⁷², namely: individual human nature *and* social role(s) seamlessly synthesised in one and the same person. The (dis)guise becomes the guarantee of the harmonious blending of social roles and human nature – something which is impossible in reality (see above), but which represents a simulation of advertising: the birth of a “*personality that is rich enough to multiply itself, and stable enough not to lose itself in the process.*”⁷³ That is why the profile of the fashion-wearing person agrees “*roughly with all famous figures, about which mass culture ‘narrates’ day by day [...].*”⁷⁴

70 SPITZER-EWERSMANN 2002, 34

71 BARTHES 1995, 260-261

72 BARTHES 1995, 262

73 BARTHES 1995, 263

74 BARTHES 1995, 267

By imitating the (for the fashion consumer) ‘lovelier’, ‘richer’, more successful’, ‘younger’ – *summa summarum*: simply apparently ‘better’ – models from fashion advertising, consumers *feel better*. A great deal of fashion advertising transports, stages and presents such characteristics and values in precisely this form. Psychologically speaking, this ‘feel-better-factor’ can be explained in many different ways, as was outlined above in, for example, the Maslowian psychology of needs and motivation. The dramaturgy within fashion staging is in this case the means to an end – to satisfy the addressed needs.

Just as painting – according to ARISTOTLE – imitates reality by means of colour and form, and writing by words, fashion imitates by means of clothes, or, more precisely: the fashionably dressed person imitates a model from reality or advertising simulation that is considered to be ‘better’: “*the imitators imitate people in action.*”⁷⁵ ARISTOTLE is interested in the concept of action: in tragedy not only people are imitated but people *in action*.

If the imitation of one’s betters is an anthropological constant, if fashion – according to KANT – is “*a law of this imitation*”⁷⁶ and tragedy – according to ARISTOTLE – seeks to imitate *better* people,⁷⁷ then staging with the aid of fashion – insofar as it seems to imitate better people – can be seen as a tragedy or a pseudo-tragedy. “*Comedy seeks to imitate worse – and tragedy better – people than those who exist in reality.*”⁷⁸

“*Tragedy is imitation of a good and self-enclosed action of a certain magnitude in attractively formed language [...].*”⁷⁹ The attractively formed language of fashion is the fashionable style of clothing in a staging related to the social context (e.g. by imitation) within the social theatre by its wearer; fashionable clothing functions as the wearer’s ‘rhetoric’ in the form of expression.

75 ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1448 a 1

76 KANT 1988, 184 [AA 244-245]

77 Cf. ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1448 a 15-19: “*for Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life. [...] the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood [...] and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated.*” [1448 a-b]

78 ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1448 a 15-19

79 ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1449 b-1450

Admittedly, certain elements⁸⁰ of (Aristotelian-)classical tragedy are lacking – e.g. capacity for knowledge and melodics. Nor is the tragic element immediately apparent. So it is advisable to speak of pseudo-tragedy, a form that still contains the following elements of Aristotelian tragedy: myth, characters, language and staging.

By myth ARISTOTLE means a particular arrangement of events, the structure of the action, the fable, the plot. “*Myth is the imitation of action. By myth I understand here the composition of events*”.⁸¹ The fashion-myth is the *transfiguring narrative of fashion advertising*, which attempts to transform the potential buyer into the real buyer. Now and again, myth is admittedly only deficiently present⁸² – or not at all – as plot (the most important element of tragedy)⁸³, for example when fashion appears without a wearer – either real, or simulated as in a dummy – and without any social relevance, as is the case in display windows or certain fashion catalogues. So it is no longer possible to speak of tragedy (the *action* is only simulated) and only with reservations of staging, even when products without human connections are transposed into staging, e.g. a T-shirt between seashells in the sand as a decoration in a shop-window display.

The group of dummies or an arrangement of objects in a shop-window display thus *simulate* and imply actions. The ‘shop-display stages’ with their scenarios and ‘models’ represent a more open space for action than is the case when prominent figures are used as pretended models, since this show-window models are to be seen as general wildcard characters that permit a more open projection by the onlooker. The onlooker completes persons, scenarios and actions in his mental picture. These variants of presentation of consumer items offers the imagination of many onlookers a greater freedom of action. The staging via prominent figures, on the other hand, appeals to a narrower range of potential consumers and binds their train of thought more strongly because of the fictive scenarios.

80 These are: “*Myth, characters, language, capacity for knowledge, staging and melodics.*” (ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1450 a 10)

81 ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1450 a 3-4

82 “*For tragedy is not the imitation of men but of actions and life-reality [...] and via this also mainly the imitation of men in action.*” ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1450 a 16-18 and b 3-4

83 Cf. ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1450 a 16

If, however, a famous person is *copied* by the consumer not only in his or her clothing but also in terms of the ‘lifestyle’ propagated by the media and advertising – which the consumer, because of the advertising staging interprets as ‘style of living’ – we are dealing with an imitation of *actions* where the element ‘myth as plot’ is present. The fashion myth as a transfiguring narrative of fashion advertising thus also contains as a ‘narrative’ in some sign system or other (image, writing, etc.) myth as plot.

Staging – according to ARISTOTLE – does not represent any necessary element of tragedy. For “*the realisation of staging the art of the costume designer [is] more important than that of the writer.*”⁸⁴ So in *staging* itself it is not the literary content but the outer form that is in the foreground. For the fashion tragedy we find something that substantiates the comparison between fashion and tragedy in Gottlieb Wilhelm RABENER’s *Kleider machen Leute [Fine feathers make fine birds]* (1755), which corresponds to Oscar Wilde attitude towards the dandy in the character of Lord HENRY:

“Clothes, blissful invention! Only clothes can perform what virtue and merit, honesty and patriotism essay in vain. Nothing seems so ridiculous to me now as an honest man in a bad suit; [...] Timorous exertion [...] for thirty years does not bring him the respect that he can gain in the space of twenty-four hours by means of a magnificent garment.”⁸⁵

Dandies as virtuosos of grandiose staging via aesthetically perfect and high-quality clothing are the best example of swift social advancement (and fall) that can be contrived with the aid of fashionable clothing.

The question whether fashion can also be a (pseudo-)comedy might be answered after the previous discussion: to the extent that fashion seeks to imitate those “worse”⁸⁶ than oneself, it becomes comedy. This certainly does not occur frequently, but it is occasionally found in carnival costumes when people choose to dress up as robbers, prostitutes, clowns or tramps. It is, however, worth asking in this connection if the models mentioned appear to the person in disguise to be ‘better’ from a certain perspective –

84 ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1450 b 20

85 RABENER 1982, 195

86 “*for Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life*” ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1448 a 15-19

why else would such disguises be chosen?⁸⁷ For within the respective social context and within the ‘rationality’ of the individual calculation regarding it, “worse than oneself” can appear to be “better than oneself”.⁸⁸

The tragic element in fashion

The tragic element in tragedy – which, by the way, is nowhere explicitly demanded by ARISTOTLE as a *sine qua non*⁸⁹ – can be defined as an aporia (= irresolvable internal contradiction) because of ethical antinomies, or, more weakly formulated, as the dilemma of two *per se* comprehensible though mutually exclusive moral attitudes or modes of action that lead to an aporia.⁹⁰ “Tragedy is where the powers that collide are both in themselves true.”⁹¹ It is not possible to immediately detect such a tragic element in fashion and its ‘show’. Tragic-ethical dilemmas exist in relation to fashion when one considers aspects that lie outside fashion itself. One could think of aporias between ecological, social and economic events in countries where the clothes are manufactured and of social norms in the country in which, because of social obligations, the clothes cannot be worn any more in the professional sphere because they are now ‘out of fashion’, despite the fact that they still have a great deal of wear in them. Here there would seem to be a certain social and ecological tragedy involved, but one that can hardly be compared with classical tragedy.

Within the historical manifestation of fashion as a generic, constant form, it is possible to detect a tragic element in the zenith of a fashion trend, when the old trend is replaced by a new one. To do this, fashion has to be split analytically into two parts, and this differentiation is essential for further discussion: on the one hand, fashion as a lasting form of a constant phenomenon in history and, on the other hand, a seasonal change of cloth-

87 Underlying the disguise is possibly the wish to dive into other roles for a certain time and to and to tear down boundaries of one’s own role.

88 A punker who dresses in a particularly ‘repulsive’ way seems, from the outside perspective, to be ‘ugly’. Within his own social environment he is a ‘better man’, because his clothing is more extreme than the others’.

89 Cf. SCHADEWALDT 1991, 31

90 For more detail: Cf. SCHELER 1964, 70

91 JASPERS 1991, 934

ing styles, i.e. as a change of content, of material, of its very fabric, in the truest sense of the word.⁹²

It was SIMMEL who noted that fashion is constant as a formal supra-historical manifestation – as a “*psychological shimmer of duration*”⁹³ – while its contents, the styles, change with the seasons. If one compares this theoretical analysis of fashion to the Platonic dualism of soul and body, the constant historical phenomena is comparable with the immortal soul and its changing contents (i.e. styles that change according to the season) with the body.

The formal element of fashion is possibly suspected by the average consumer especially when s/he is faced with other forms of clothing, such as liturgical robes, which are scarcely subject to fashion cycles. This average consumer is mainly aware of the seasonal change of fashion’s content, the change of styles. This constant change of styles conceals the disappearance of the old fashion and the emergence of the new. Accordingly, from a Platonic point of view just as the body experiences death and birth, but not the soul, which is immortal. Applied to fashion, a fashion style ‘dies’ when a new one is born. “*Fashion is dead, long live fashion?*”⁹⁴ is the heading of a chapter that examines fashion in the postmodern world. The designer, as the one giving birth, is responsible for the creation of the new fashion and thus indirectly like an executioner for the death of the old one. The new fashion ousts and ‘kills’ the old one because of its increasing presence. The ‘murder’ of the old fashion by the new one is inevitable, for the cycles of fashion and their alternation have assumed an autopoietical nature.⁹⁵ This autopoietical nature of the fashion cycles is the immortal formal constituent element of fashion.⁹⁶ Neither the designer nor the individual consumers are in a position to halt the cycles of fashion. Stopping the cycles of fashion

92 The Aristotelian doctrine of form and substance (i.e. material or content) is being essayed here. Care should be taken not to confuse the philosophical concept of form with the new forms of clothing that are subject to fashion.

93 SIMMEL 1996b, 34

94 SOMMER, WIND 1988, 191

95 Cf. LUHMANN 1984

96 BAUDRILLARD (1982, 133) calls fashion the “*highest realisation of political economy*”.

could at best be achieved via economic or governmental control mechanisms.

This constellation conceals a tragic aspect, in both an ethical and aesthetic respect: If a fashion has established itself, its aesthetics could assert itself in such a way that it is at least tolerated and accepted by most consumers. This does not mean that the fashion which is topical at any given time has to be seen as 'beautiful', but it will be *perceived* as a social-aesthetic authority, accepted by the wearer. This fashion, despite its success, will nevertheless be superseded every season by a fashion that displays a similar topical success. It is not the stronger, better, more handsome hero that wins the battle for the favour of the mass public but the newer or the younger one.

The fashion imperative: *Wear the clothes that will generally be worn!* or, more briefly: *Wear fashionable clothes!*, implies an ethical, or rather socio-ecological problem. The socio-ecological tragic aspect lies in the fact that fashionable clothes cannot be used for several seasons. Their use is over, as soon as a new fashion appears on the social stage of everyday life. The old fashion has to 'die', because the new one has arrived. Anyone still adhering to the old fashion runs the danger of not being accepted in certain social contexts. "*A final perspective on fashion can only result from the consideration of how each generation sees the one that has just passed as being the most effective anti-aphrodisiac that can possibly be conceived.*"⁹⁷ So the old fashion is disposed of, disappears from the public stage of everyday life, without actually being unusable from a material perspective. It is only 'unwearable' because it is unfashionable, or 'yesterday's clothing'.

So the tragic element of fashion is where the old fashion loses presence in society and the new fashion triumphs over the old one. In this peripeteia of the fashion tragedy, fashion kills itself; or the old fashion is killed by the new one:

"For fashion was never anything else than the parody of the dressed-up corpse, a provocation of death [...] and among shrill memorised laughter a bitterly whispered conversation with decay. That is what fashion is. That is why it changes so rapidly;

97 BENJAMIN 1989, B 1a,4

tickles the dead person and has already become another, new one when he turns round to look for her and to strike her down.”⁹⁸

Like SIMMEL, BENJAMIN sees fashion as a phenomenon that transforms itself but that is constantly present, as something that challenges death since it transforms itself before death can catch up with it. The phenomenon of fashion as form remains constant and no longer disappears from the stage of public everyday life. But the contents, the individual fashion styles, come and go, die and are reborn in the constant presence and durability of an overall formal phenomenon that changes but never dies.

This tragic point of death of the old fashion – often hard to localise in everyday life – corresponds to the peripeteia of the fashion tragedy: the formerly new fashion becomes old-fashioned, the former heroine that was once venerated and appreciated by all dies or slowly perishes, although she is only one season old. She dies because a newer fashion triumphs over her and delivers the death-blow simple because she is younger. The old fashion is banned from society. This is what distinguishes fashion consumer goods from other goods.

Catharsis

Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude [...] that excites misery and horror and thereby effects a purgation of such emotional states.⁹⁹

It is not the intention to perform an ‘autopsy’ on the often quoted definition of tragedy in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which has not infrequently been interpreted to suit the purposes of particular interests. LESSING’s frequently constrained interpretation of *eleos* and *phobos* (pity and fear) was useful for his pedagogical intention, but it is untenable in the light of philological considerations, as the concepts have been used since Homer in the sense of “*elementary affects*” namely *deep emotion, being moved and dread, being*

98 BENJAMIN 1989, B1,4

99 ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1449 b-1450

*frightened and terror*¹⁰⁰. ARISTOTELES relating of *eleos* and *phobos* to *catharsis* (purgation) would suggest a medical reference rather than a moral or pedagogical one. In GORGAS the cultivation of *eleos* and *phobos* was a means of rhetoric. ARISTOTELES was the first to link such affects to a cathartic effect: (Over-)consumption of something leads – if properly done – to the excretion of waste products that have formed in the body.¹⁰¹ ARISTOTLE ascribes a cathartic and healing effect to certain particular forms of music (e.g. flute music during the celebration of orgies)¹⁰² that purges the listener from misery, horror and similar affects. Through the “*purifying songs*” the listener experiences a “*certain purification*” and feels a “*pleasant relief*” and “*harmless joy*”.¹⁰³ Catharsis – in ARISTOTLE at least – is a pleasure or a joy: The writer of tragedies brings about a joy that, by the imitation of actions, excites misery and horror and thereby purges the spectator from such affects.

The roots of Greek tragedy are not only to be found in the Dionysian cult.¹⁰⁴ If this religious cult with its cyclical recurrence handed down cathartic elements of cosmogonic myths, it would be of interest to know to what extent it excited such affects as strong emotion and fright and whether this cult really did have cathartic and therapeutic effects. ARISTOTLE at any rate ascribes a purifying effect to it. And this can perhaps explain the general popularity of cinema and television. Strong emotion and fright (*eleos and phobos*) can also be found in present-day film dramas – the cathartic result of these could be assessed. It is certainly possible to speak of catharsis in this area, i.e. where actions are emotionally registered by the onlooker and by being moved by the content of the action this onlooker experiences

100 Cf. SCHADEWALDT 1991, 15-18; Cf. MEINHOLD 2013a, 44-47

101 This form of catharsis can, in the shape of an obsession, also assume pathological forms – just think of bulimia, for example.

102 ARISTOTLE *Politics* 1341 a 23-24

103 Cf. ARISTOTELES *Politics* 1342 a 10-17

104 The Greek *tragodia* is derived from *tragos* (male goat) and *odae* (song), the singer of the dithyramb was disguised as a goat during the Dionysian ceremonies. An ‘imitatio dei’ is taking place in the Dionysian cult: the god Dionysos is imitated during the ceremonies. The sole origin of tragedy from the Dionysian cult is, however, disputed. (Cf. SCHADEWALDT 1991).

an impetus for his own action, which in turn leads to an improvement of his present situation.

It is also conceivable that during rites of passage and, in particular, initiation rites, the neophyte¹⁰⁵ experiences – within the framework of a symbolic death – strong emotion and fright. Through the initiation, the neophyte changes his ontological and social status and is symbolically reborn.¹⁰⁶ The neophyte's existence changes because he is initiated into the mysteries and as a new person becomes part of a new world. Strong emotion and fear do not occur directly but indirectly, however, within the imitation (the *imitatio dei*) through the proximity of death and his symbolic death.¹⁰⁷ Purification follows through the symbolic rebirth. Such religious rituals purify the individual, since via the 'imitatio dei' he becomes a "*contemporary*" of a world-creating god; the periodic return to rituals relating to the creation of the world saves human existence from death and the void.¹⁰⁸ The sick person experiences purgation – he regains his health because via participating in the rite it is as his life begins afresh with new resources.¹⁰⁹ The sacred rite is rooted in the myth of creation or the origin of the world. Taking part in the myth of cosmogony via the rite is similar to a reincarnating therapy: through the recitation of the myth of the origin of the world the sick person is reborn.

To sum up, it can be said of catharsis that it represents a technical term borrowed from medicine which describes purgation, restoration or discharging of such mental affects as strong emotion, fright and similarly stored "*such states of arousal*".¹¹⁰ These affects are admittedly *called forth* or 'completed' by tragedy, but are already at least latently present: "[...] *this affect is present in all souls, the difference only being one of degree*

105 The Greek word *neophytos* actually means 'newly planted', newcomer, from *phyton*: vegetation, plant, tree. ELIADE calls the persons neophytes who, through sacral rites, enter the world of adults.

106 Cf. ELIADE 1988, 15

107 Cf. ELIADE 1957, 111-112. The extraction of teeth, amputation of limbs, tattooing, circumcision and the like would, at any rate, certainly encourage strong emotion and fright in the neophyte.

108 Cf. ELIADE 1957, 63

109 Cf. ELIADE 1957, 62

110 Cf. ARISTOTELES *Poe* 1449 b-1450

[...].”¹¹¹ This means that tragedy brings these latently present affects to *light*. The catharsis probably takes place because of the identification of the onlookers with the characters acting out the tragedy – although ARISTOTLE does not completely clarify this – at least not in the first part of the *Poetics* (or in the otherwise preserved fragments of his *akroamatic* writings). Perhaps they were discussed in detail in the second, lost part of the *Poetics*, the discourse on comedy.

Catharsis is to be defined here as a therapeutic effect which, as a result of a *dis-charge* or *purgation* of strong emotions, follows states of arousal, e.g. emotionally registered actions, and which expresses itself in a joylike, lasting feeling of ‘wellbeing’. Fashion as (pseudo-)tragedy and staging via new fashion provide apparent catharsis: the identification of the fashion consumer with possible idols from the world of models, stars and other such (partly simulated) idols with the aid of ‘lifestyle’ (i.e. consumption, especially fashion consumption) follows as a compensatory surrogate action, since there is a lack of intrinsic ‘models’ and frameworks for the organising of one’s own life, or because they are not recognisable to, or have been repressed by, the imitator. In strongly religious societies, myth supplies the example for human action. In modern societies, the marketers of consumer items fill the now vacant ‘meaning gaps’ with meta-goods. Consumer-related, compensatory surrogate actions, though, only provide *apparent* catharsis, because they do not offer lasting purgation from affects but overlie them. The pseudo-catharsis of consumption combats symptoms but offers no therapy. A person with a weak self-awareness is only temporarily strengthened by exclusive consumer products. A catharsis – here: a lasting purgation or dis-charge, e.g. from the fear of inferiority – must pervade the mental depths of an individual, since, as Lord HENRY asserts, one cannot “*heal the soul with the senses*”¹¹², at least not alone with the senses.

The apparent catharsis or pseudo-catharsis manifests itself in short periods of ‘wellness’, e.g. in a feeling of joy or pleasure because one has imitated ‘better’, or, more precisely, ‘more successful, rich, beautiful or younger’ people, as the result of lacking a style of life that one has drawn up oneself. The consumer makes do with ‘lifestyle’, instead of developing a personal style of life. Figuratively speaking, he fills the empty husk of a

111 ARISTOTLE *Pol* 1342 a 6-7

112 WILDE 1985, 181

schematic, nebulous model-life concept with consumer items that cause him to believe that he has thereby instantaneously acquired meta-goods that import the *'lifestyle of society'* into his style of life.¹¹³ The pseudo-catharsis is a feeling of 'wellbeing', of pleasure or of joy resulting from a 'lifestyle' via imitative staging with the aid of fashion and consumer products that promise meta-goods. The fashion myth, the deceiving narrative of fashion advertising, makes consumers believe that they can acquire a style of life or even an art of living via consumption or lifestyle. Fashion advertising and marketing employ myths. They 'narrate' via a lifestyle something as being an art of living which is nothing more than a simulation. The actual serious intention of fashion advertising is maximising the profit of sellers and marketers; the content of the actual advertising is, however, simulation and, not infrequently, deception. The deception practised by advertising lies in the absolutist claims as to the effectiveness of the meta-goods. Making contact is *always* successful with the aid of a particular cigarette brand, there is always a clever head behind the newspaper – the deception lies in the promise of 'always'. Marketing strategists actually assume that the consumer does not take the statements of the advertisement seriously, but that subconsciously when considering a reader of a newspaper we nevertheless begin to suspect that a clever head has to be behind it even so. Hardly anybody 'believes' advertising statements; nevertheless, they presumably make a subconscious impact. The correlation between advertising intensity/quality and product sales cannot be empirically documented without further ado. Immense sums are involved in the marketing of fashionable consumer goods; so one can at least assume that hopes are extremely high that advertising must have an enhancing effect on sales.

A further method used by fashion advertising is the claim of the improvement (melioration) of the whole person via consumer items and their meta-goods.

113 "We have attempted to perform a couple of miracles for you. Experience the exhilarating *Lifestyle of Society*, experience people whose style turns you on – and let yourself be inspired by them!" WALBERER, Jörg: Editorial. In: *Life&Style*, No. 3, Hamburg, October 1999, p. 3.

MELIORATION

The philosophy of clothes is the philosophy of human nature. All of anthropology is contained in clothes. Admittedly, clothes are not primarily to cover one's shame, but they are corrections to the human ego. When persons dress, they make themselves into a piece of world. The act of dressing means a turning away from the self, a self-disguise-as-world.¹¹⁴

Melioration represents here human striving for what is better, especially for the better life.¹¹⁵ The author is here making use of a concept that – like the term sustainability – comes from the sphere of forestry and agriculture, where it refers to the management of naturally sparse resources. Melioration refers to cultural (i.e. humanly devised) measures to improve the quality of the soil. Analogously, humans can be considered as a (nature-given) resource which, like arable land, is not removed from cultural influences but which – unlike arable land – is also able to 'cultivate' itself.

The concept of melioration can then be described as the constant striving of humanity for enhancement or improvement that can be observed since the Palaeolithic Age within all cultural spheres. Enhancement is to be seen as a subcategory of improvement. Already in the Old Stone Age, people sought to improve their surroundings in order to 'live better' – whether by using primitive tools or building dwellings. All world religions feature the improvement of virtues. All practising of art – regardless of the artistic outcome – is a melioration of the artist. Fashion is a manifestation of the human striving for the beautiful and the better in the vestimentary domain. Although clothes almost become a part of the body when worn, they are more easily formable and more quickly 'replaceable' than body parts.¹¹⁶

114 LEEUW 1941, 23

115 Lat. *melior* 'better', comparative of *bonus* 'good'

116 Consider organ implants or transplants ('donated' or purchased kidneys or livers) which combine with the body to form an ameliorated unit – as long as they are not rejected.

That the human body – like clothing – is nevertheless subject to fashion ‘dogmas’ when it comes to form, colour and nature is not always obvious. The arrival of gene technology ushers in a new era of removing deficiencies and of self-improvement, i.e. the melioration of human beings in general. In the following, it will be demonstrated that melioration via technology that humanity uses on itself (*anthropotechnology*, or human factors technology) is also subject to fashion – fashion here in the broadest sense of the term [IV] – that changes here are always similar to the taste of the period, as are fashions in clothing. So by the term melioration the human intention to improve oneself and one’s life is meant, and by human factors technology the technology used by human beings to ameliorate their own bodies or those of others.¹¹⁷ Because of the highly controversial nature of the *topos* anthropo-technological melioration within the field of genetics, anthropotechnology as a manifestation of fashion in the broadest sense will also be dealt with in this chapter.

Next, it should be remembered that the striving for the more beautiful and the better represents an anthropological constant that not only manifests itself within the typical spheres of the arts, architecture and design (e.g. utensils) but also in the ‘more direct covering’ of human beings: in changes to the periphery of the body, as, for example, the introduction of something foreign to or into the body. Changes subject to fashion both to and within the body range from anthropotechnology in general to genetic ‘design’ in particular.

Melioration of the entire human being

Varieties of past or strange fashions reminiscent of the Procrustean bed – like the body-(de)forming corset of Spanish court fashion or the neck rings that gradually stretch the neck found in certain tribes in Africa or northern

117 Cf. WEIL 2002, 16. Peter SLOTERDIJK understands by anthropotechnology the taming and cultivation of humans via their own species in humanity parks (SLOTERDIJK 1999, 39-56). Anthropotechnology is particularly interested in the physical body, while the concept of *self-technology* in Michel FOUCAULT refers to a use of norms that is applied by humans to their thinking, behaviour and action. Josef RAUSCHER calls man in the actual portrayal *homo faber fabricatus*, “his own fabrication in the technical sense”. RAUSCHER 2000, 17

Thailand – would now seem suspect, at least from a medical point of view. Even so, there are, for example, shoes that are still worn whose form does not accord with the shape of the human foot. Clothes and their accessories can make the shape of the human body seem different from what it actually is, or even *de facto* alter it – at times irreversibly. It is regarded as normal in northern Europe to tan one's skin in solariums. In contemporary African and South East Asian cultures it is not unusual to use skin products that whiten the skin.

In the following, the beautifying and improving aspect of fashion – based on clothing – *for the actual human being* will now be focused on. For humans do not only use aesthetic norms outside themselves that are subject to fashion – in art and architecture, for example – but also use them *on themselves*. Humans consider themselves to be malleable, or rather 'material' that can be made more beautiful or better. The form of clothing is only a variant of the manifestations of the aestheticisation and melioration of humans that can be subject to fashion. Human striving for improvement, beauty and a beautiful life – or for a life 'in beauty' – is, however, clearly expressed in fashion and in fashion advertising. The latter not only deals with the aesthetics of clothing but also promises a *holistic* aesthetics, namely the aestheticisation and melioration of the entire human being and his or her life. For marketing-strategic reasons the totality of an individual is expanded beyond the biological body to include purchased consumer goods and their meta-goods. The totality of the human being is his or her individual continuity. Advertising for fashion consumer items expands this 'original' totality of the human being for strategic reasons to do with consumer goods and their meta-goods: It is only via the consumer goods and its properties that the person depicted in the advertisement becomes a complete human being. Expressed negatively: without the corresponding consumer goods and meta-goods the human being, according to the depiction of the advertisement, remains incomplete. These culturally predetermined incompleteness – i.e. deficiency – in the individual is particularly visible when it comes to clothes, when a person is not or not suitably dressed. An 'unsuitably' or unclothed person is perceived in the corresponding social context as an 'incomplete aesthetic manifestation'. Advertising promises to make the incomplete individual a totality. Consumer items are to even out individual personal deficiencies, or complete individuality regarding a particular quality that, along with the consumer item, can be purchased as

meta-goods. This evening out of deficiencies and completion of individuality found in the advertising of fashion consumer items often speaks in the comparative: more beautiful, more successful, younger – in short, the consumer becomes ‘better’ with the aid of the (meta-)goods extolled in advertising. In the following, this ‘comparative’ towards which melioration is oriented will be dealt with in more detail.

Life as comparative

Edgar Allen POE allows a certain Mr. ELLISON in *The Landscape Garden* to postulate that “*the true character, the august aims, the supreme majesty and dignity of the poetic sentiment [...] lie in the creation of novel forms of Beauty*”.¹¹⁸ The human being constantly endeavoured, in some form or other, to beautify or ameliorate his surroundings: The “*immortal yearning for beauty [has] always found its satisfaction*.”¹¹⁹

Arnold GEHLEN justified the special position of man in nature because of his being deficiently “*equipped with organic weapons or organic means of protection*”¹²⁰ such as doubtful or degenerate instincts and modest sensory capacity. He expressed this deficient anthropological constitution of man by the term *creature of deficiencies* (Mängelwesen), a term taken from Johann Gottfried von HERDER. Because of this deficient nature of his constitution, man is obliged “*to alter nature, no matter how it is constituted, in such a way that it is expedient to his life*.”¹²¹ If one thinks of such examples as telescopes, night-sight apparatus, diving rafts, etc., it is obvious that by ‘nature’ the nature of man may also be meant. Because of its deficits compared with other living creatures that have specialised within a particular environment, it has to try to change or improve it.

Although one can only partially accept the hypothesis of GEHLEN regarding man as a creature of deficiencies, since human beings can find themselves both at a disadvantage and at an advantage – according to the basis for comparison – when it comes to a comparison of organs and instincts, it must nevertheless be maintained that they cannot avoid changing

118 POE 1841, 160; <http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/land.pdf>

119 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 9

120 GEHLEN 1993, 17

121 GEHLEN 1993, 18

nature, or ‘improving’ it for their own ends.¹²² According to GEHLEN, the deficient nature of humanity is the fundament of culture.

Man is a being that seeks to improve his environment and himself: A being that meliorates his life.¹²³ Even so, man does not really strive for the ‘good life’ – for in human life the good has something of a ‘half-life’ about it, depending on the extent to which the good been striven for is actually achieved – but rather for the ‘better life’.¹²⁴

On the one hand BAUDELAIRE is right when he says that “*fashion must be regarded as a symptom of the striving for the ideal*”¹²⁵, for man has an ideal – like a Platonic idea – as his objective, something he strives for but never attains. Should he even so attain an ‘ideal’, which in our world as a cave¹²⁶ only represents a *supposed* ideal, the deficiency ideality of this ideal will soon be revealed and a ‘better ideal’ will emerge that by definition deprives the old ideal of its ideal status. In all his daily exertions, man does not ultimately strive for the superlative, for the ‘best’, – since this represents an ideal construction that will have to be revised or optimised, i.e. improved on, as more experience is gained – but for the ‘better’. Thus the ideal of ‘the best life’ is utopian in orientation, something that will never be achieved but that can serve as a point of reference that governs melioration. In practice, however, man basically strives for what is better. What is ‘better’ is measured comparatively with the state arrived at so far.¹²⁷

122 Cf. also GRÄTZEL 1997, 24

123 Within linguistics, *meliorativum* refers to terms that have undergone a positive change in meaning, rather like a term such as *marshall*, which now designates a high military rank but whose original meaning is groom. In musicology, *melismatics* is the art of melodic ornamentation.

124 This anthropological constant is also related to myopia and the phenomenon of diminishing marginal utility.

125 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 38

126 An allusion to PLATO’s representation of human existence in a cave in the so-called allegory of the cave in the *Politeia*.

127 According to empirical investigations, the majority of people prefer, for example, a lesser income if the person asked can be sure that no one else will earn more than he or she does. This nominal reduction of income would correspond to a relative increase of income and to a real economic elevation of status.

This striving for the ‘better life’ varies according to the person involved and the individual intention. The exertions made for self-improvement are reflected in the translations of *melior* and its positive form *bonus* (e.g. ‘beautiful’, ‘virtuous’, ‘healthy’). According to the form of life desired, man aims at improvements within different spheres.¹²⁸ In the reality of everyday life, the most diverse of intentional improvements coexist, coincide and collide – those relating, for example, to manifestation, mode of work, social relations, formation of identity, self-realisation, etc. To express it in a negative way: Little is to be found in daily life that cannot be directly subsumed under melioration. Indirectly, every attitude and action contributes to a melioration of life, which is why the *intention* and *striving* to improve plays a crucial role in fashion marketing and advertising. So melioration – man’s striving for a better life – can be assumed to be an anthropological constant that manifests itself in some form or other in all cultural spheres and in every epoch of history.

SIMMEL describes the essence of human life by the concepts “more-life” and “more-than-life”, where life constantly thinks of itself and relates to itself in the comparative: life transcends itself, it is “*to be understood as something that constantly transcends the boundary of its own ‘beyond’ and has its own being in this transcendence [...]. Life finds its nature, its process in being more-life and more-than-life, and as such its positive is already its comparative.*”¹²⁹ The ‘self-transcendence of life’¹³⁰ expresses itself in these two complementary forms: more-life as the generation of the living in the sense of the transcending of one’s own life by the generation of new life, and more-than-life, the transcendence of the boundary of individual life at the level of the mind via creative power. “*Life can only exist if it is more-life; as long as life exists at all, it generates what is living, since even physiological self-maintenance involves constant reproduction: that is not a*

128 The ideal-typical examples can be mentioned by way of illustration: the dandy strives for a more beautiful aesthetic appearance, the monk would like to be more virtuous, the eater of raw fruit and vegetables wants to be healthier, etc. One and the same intention to improve can be seen in all these ideal types.

129 SIMMEL 1999, 234; Cf. also: SOLIES 1998, 35-62. For a criticism of the logical contradiction of the conception of SIMMEL’s more-life and more-than-life, cf. RICKERT 1920, 69.

130 SIMMEL 1999, 229

function it carries out alongside others; in actually doing it, it is precisely life."¹³¹ When life transcends more-life – “*this is the case when we call ourselves creative*”¹³², SIMMEL speaks of more-than-life, which is “*the nature of mental life itself*”¹³³. Both comparative forms of life together constitute human life as such. The affinity of this concept to the Platonic conception of love as generation in the Beautiful is obvious: “*And just as the generation of this autonomous being (subsequently independent of its generator) is immanent in physiological life and precisely characterises life as such, so is the generation of an autonomously meaningful content immanent at the level of the mind.*”¹³⁴ Life with a view of its comparative – “*life transcending its own boundaries, is not something that comes to it from the outside. It is its own immediate being itself*”¹³⁵. So human striving for improvement and comparatives is not an accident but an essential basic condition of man. Fashion is always a historical manifestation of the present trends of melioration, from the painting of the cave (fashion concept IV) to the silk dress of Saison XY (fashion concept I).

Marketing seizes on the intentional human desire for improvement and implants it as meta-goods in advertising consumer products: skin creams make you younger, cigarettes more emancipated, newspapers cleverer, dresses more beautiful, steel watches tougher, sports cars better performing and deodorants olfactory and thus generally more socially acceptable. The advertising of fashion consumer items conveys the order of comparative improvement to the potential consumer. It exclaims the *imperative of comparative melioration*: ‘Improve yourself!’, ‘either better than you already are or better than others!’ Such exclamations are above all found where advertising strategists believe that the consumer involved suspects a personal lack – in the areas of beauty, youth, health and mental energy and power – and also intelligence, i.e. in the realms of ‘spiritual’ beauty, health and power.

The most large-scale attempt to ameliorate man is found in state utopias. Here an ideal social system is drawn up with the aim of improving the

131 SIMMEL 1999, 229

132 SIMMEL 1999, 232

133 SIMMEL 1999, 232

134 SIMMEL 1999, 232

135 SIMMEL 1999, 295

entire world image and human image. In such utopias it is not ultimately a question of how man is to be constituted or ‘adapted’ so that the ideal state system can be created or maintained. The issue of the melioration of life of all men quickly becomes an issue of the melioration of the individual. In PLATO’s *Politeia*, *Nomoi* and the *Politikos*, but also in modern social-ecological utopias – Aldous HUXLEY’s *Island*, Ursula LEGUIN’s *The Dispossessed* and Ernest CALLENBACH’s *Ecotopia*¹³⁶ – the conception of the ideal state calls for the conception of man: the question is raised as to how man is to improve for the state system to be able to improve, and vice versa.

SLOTERDIJK speaks ironically, even cynically, in this connection – looking back at the Platonic state utopia *Politikos* and forward to biotechnological possibilities – of “*human enhancement*” via “*taming*” and “*breeding*” in the “*human zoo*”.¹³⁷ The content of this utopia is to adapt the virtues and customs of a society via education as well as human selection. SLOTERDIJK urges us, because of the new anthropotechnological possibilities for improvement, or progress, to “*formulate a codex of anthropotechnology*”.¹³⁸ Not only does individual melioration gain new dimensions through biotechnological progress but the entire human species will be affected by these innovations. Man and his being were admittedly always conceived of in the comparative: in art, medicine, ethics and utopia. Today, however, three particular events coincide that are intimately interconnected and that profoundly influence the prevailing image of humanity and its options for improvement:

In the age of biotechnology we are faced with the problem of having the possibility of taking genetic measures to bring about the biological melioration – or assumed melioration – of human beings that could affect future generations, according to the nature of the intervention. It is at present not possible to say about these technologies what the long-term ethical consequences may be. This point represents a historical novelty.

The prevalent view of humanity, especially in the bio-sciences, is a mechanical one, or at least one that is strongly influenced by physics. This had led to a one-sided concentration on the body, which it is easier to explain

136 Cf. MEINHOLD 2013c; MEINHOLD 2011c

137 Cf. SLOTERDIJK 1999, 35-55

138 SLOTERDIJK 1999, 45

via physical revelations than the phenomenon of the mind, which in this monistic view of man is often regarded as a ‘precipitate’ of the body and that can ultimately be explained and treated according to physical rules.

It follows from these two points that medico-therapeutic melioration of man mainly focuses on his physical nature and that his mental constitution is only treated as a second instance. Marketers, as more holistic ‘therapists’, have recognised this lack, which is why possibilities of mental improvement via meta-goods are included in advertising strategies. To speak cynically, it is possible to discern a ‘therapeutic labour division’ in commercialized societies: While classical school medicine firstly deals with treating the body and places the psyche second, advertising has recognised the market lacuna ‘melioration of the psyche’ and filled it with meta-goods.

In the following excursive section the focus is on melioration of the body via *anthropotechnology*. This will widen the focus to the broad concept of fashion [IV], so that man himself can be considered as a phenomenon included in fashion.

The body as the medium of fashion

Not only clothing but also the body that wears it has been subject to fashion ideals for thousands of years. We are familiar with the beauty ideals of past centuries: the idealised statues of the Egyptians or of Greek Antiquity as well as RUBENS’ oil paintings bear witness to them.¹³⁹

139 In passing, it is worth mentioning Fr. Cyprian OHNHÄUSER’s *Über Hälse und Waden. Ein Beytrag zur Philosophie der Mode* (1799): In this essay the form of necks and (male) calves are shown to be dependent on fashion (Fashion concept IV): In the period between Spanish court fashion (16th century) and the French Revolution – during which particularly strong calves were in fashion among males and a ‘deficiency’ within this area led to attempts being made to disguise the fact by using ‘attachable calf enhancers’ – a countess seeks a husband for her daughter by assessing his calves, but, finding no fine calves among the aristocracy, chooses a farmer’s son instead. OHNHÄUSER attempts in this ‘philosophical’ contribution to justify the reason for the ‘calf fashion’ of this age: “*Male calves are the true thermometer of men’s practical affection, the real barometer of their physical strength, the money tray of their amorous hours of instruction, the ledger of their female expenditure; believe*

A long history of anthropotechnology can be traced through history. In certain cases it served the ‘beautification’, i.e. the aesthetic improvement of the body or the whole person, and in many cases this melioration was subject to the culture-dependent ‘taste’ of the age in question. The sharpening of teeth in Mexico, the deformation of the feet in ancient China, the elongation of the neck in certain African countries or in some Hill Tribes in Thailand – but also tattoos and decorative scars are examples of anthropotechnological melioration from standpoints that were influenced by the ‘fashion’ of the time and the culture (Fashion concept IV). This involved intervention on and to the body, the results of which last a longer period of time than the seasons of fashionable dress do and which the persons in question may or must have for the rest of their lives. Such ritualised and heavily symbolic intervention did not originally have anything to do with fashion in the narrowest sense [I], but it has now established itself in Western societies as fashion trends, such as non-permanent henna-dyeing of extremities, piercings and tattoos that cannot simply be removed.

Ideals of beauty presented by prominent figures in the media can be imitated and reproduced by using anthropotechnological interventions. Particular physical forms or forms of ‘physical details’ acquire attention and labelling via the media, and plastic surgery makes such kind of imitation possible. These ideals of beauty are completely dependent on fashion. The repeated exposure of prominent figures in relevant magazines frequently establishes ideals of beauty that lead to *imitatio prominentis*.

Fashion can include all realms of the human.¹⁴⁰ Man, who ‘makes’ fashion, is himself the material of fashion. As a “*finite creator [...] he is himself inevitable material of his own sense-creating act.*”¹⁴¹ In short, man changes himself *via* fashion. Fashion can bring about corrections of the human

me, worthy gentlemen comrades, women are the greatest connoisseurs of calves...” (20–21). “Ah!” the countess said, when the young marriage partner had provided the strongest of evidence as to how exactly his calves matched his other talents: Love precedes honour, and good calves old papers.” (29)

140 Even philosophy and ethics are subject to ‘fashion’ trends (Cf. in this connection: PATON, Herbert James (1937) *Fashion and Philosophy* and ADENSAMER, Michael (1999) *Ethik als Mode?*)

141 FINK 1969, 23

ego.¹⁴² The reversal of the saying “People make clothes – clothes make people” can just as well be applied to fashion: “People make fashions – fashions make people.”

In the wake of revolutionary advances in genetic technology the possibility not only exists of the outer physical appearance being included in fashion trends but also its ‘components’, even the smallest. The anthropotechnological possibilities – combined with the aesthetic demand of people for a selectable, or at least manipulable, genetic ‘design’ of themselves, that of their descendants or a part of the species – confront ethics, politics and the humanities with a previously unknown problem. Via these gene-technological possibilities, the perspective is fast approaching where people will allow the colour of their skin and shape of their body to be meliorated using gene technology. This will raise problems of a socio-ethical nature in situations where “*a genetic change is brought about that in turn is inheritable*”. In such cases “*the improving or curative intervention into genetic potential acquires a completely new quality.*”¹⁴³ Dystopias¹⁴⁴ such as *Gattaca*¹⁴⁵ and *The Matrix*¹⁴⁶ point to socio-ethical disasters arising from the selection and manipulation of humans and their genetic basis. Behind the construction of such ethical horror scenarios, however, there is more than just the wish to improve mankind. What is depicted in such utopias, dystopias and science fiction is the vision of eternal youth and immortality, coupled with the fear of the amoral instrumentalisation of anthropotechnology. Here, science fiction is taken just as critically and seriously as science.

The striving for eternal youth and immortality in its various facets is the theme of the next chapter, in which we return once more to the narrowest concept of fashion.

142 Cf. LEEUW 1941, 23

143 Both quotations are from RAUSCHER 2000, 15

144 Dystopia: Technical term for an ‘anti-’ or ‘negative’ utopia. Classic dystopias are: Aldous HUXLEY’s *Brave New World* (1932) and George ORWELL’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

145 NICCOL, Andrew (1997) *Gattaca* [cinematic film]

146 The WACHOWSKIS (1999) *The Matrix* [cinematic film]; Cf. MEINHOLD 2009

REINVESTINATION

People live in the present, seek to orientate themselves towards it and prefer positive goods in it.¹⁴⁷ Alongside traditional and lasting phenomena, they are fond of what is new and from a certain age onwards they tend to prefer what is younger to what is older. The young (person, animal or plant) represents a symbol of life, freshness and vigour. Humans take pleasure in phenomena that have to do with renewal, such as signs of spring in nature or small children. But a person cannot remain eternally young. As a human being a person cannot avoid dealing with transcendence and metaphysical issues because of this very humanity, and *topoi* such as immortality and reincarnation are essential thoughts in religion.

Fashion makes a contribution to constancy and immortality but also to novelty and the present. It is extremely marketable because of human shortsightedness and certain consumption motives that are aimed at such anthropological ‘constants’ as neophilia and preference for the present, or culturally determined phenomena such as the tabooing of old age, ageing, dying and death.

In the following subsections man’s present-orientation and his preference for it will be related to fashion. His pleasure in the new and the young as well as his striving for the constant will be shown to be anthropological facts that manifest themselves in fashion. The distanced and at times taboo-laden dealings our society has with the phenomena of old age, ageing, dying and death make their hidden contribution to the consumption of fashion. This is evident from the fact that advertisements for fashionable products link the desire for *immortality* or *reincarnation* – as meta-goods – with consumption goods. For that reason, these phenomena will be analysed in the last two subsections of this chapter. We will first consider human existence in the present and continue with an investigation of the wish for an existence in eternity. The following subchapters will focus on presence, neophilia, myopia, youth, immortality and reincarnation all of which are *topoi* fashion marketing exploits by linking such *topoi* as meta-goods to products.

147 In micro-economics, alongside positive and neutral goods there is also talk of *negative* goods, or of a ‘bad’ (Cf. VARIAN, 1995, 39).

Present-orientation and temporal structure of fashion

Clothing is only really fashionable if offered and worn in the present. Fashion ‘proves’ the present to man. According to SIMMEL, “*present fashion is always at the watershed between past and future*”¹⁴⁸; it “*increasingly concentrates consciousness on the present*”¹⁴⁹, which leads to it being perceived as a manifestation of the present. In *Sartor Resartus* Thomas CARLYLE lets his protagonist Diogenes TEUFELSDRÖCK define the present as an insignificant membrane between the past and the future.¹⁵⁰ The present tense can thus be conceived of as a point – i.e. without extension – that marks the boundary between past time and future time. Despite this, the present, as subjectively experienced by man, is perceived more as a *period* of time than a *point* in time, because the former subsumes *immediately past* moments as just as much part of his subjectively *experienced* present as *immediately imminent* moments. Positively experienced moments can be perceived as passing in a flash, and negatively experienced ones might be lasting almost interminably. Reciprocal to subjective *perception* is the *wish* to *feel fully* subjectively experienced periods of time: one wants beautiful moments to linger, while that which is felt to be negative one would like to be over and done with quickly.¹⁵¹ So man wants an intense present-orientation when the present promises something pleasant; but if something unpleasant is threatened, he prefers – insofar as it is possible – a direct transition from the past into the future, without having to pass through the present – or he wishes for a *different* present.

Since man always *de facto* lives in, with or instantaneously parallel to the present, he is – existentially speaking – dependent on it. For if he does not live in the present, he does not yet exist or no longer exists. To the extent that man loves his existence, he must also love the present, because it justifies his existence and “*life only has reality in the moment of the pre-*

148 SIMMEL 1996a, 197

149 SIMMEL 1996a, 197

150 CARLYLE 1991, 334

151 Cf. GOETHE'S *Faust I* 1991, 48, Verses 1699-1702

When thus I hail the Moment flying:

“Ah, still delay--thou art so fair!”

Then bind me in thy bonds undying,...

sent”¹⁵². Man’s being fettered to the present can also be perceived as an existential fatality. He has no other chance – apart from those listed below – of being instantaneous with the present. Neither a real leap into the past nor into the future is possible. The experiencing of the present means existence. If man wishes to exist, he normally wishes to do so in the present. Complete (subjective) stagnation of man in the present would allow the past (which is constantly ‘growing’ as regards the period of time it covers) to acquire subjectively fixed value, because the past (subjective) would not be continued any more; and, in the event of stagnation in the present, the future would no longer be available. If the present were *de facto* to last for ever for a person – as a thought experiment – the past would become a past that no longer grew, that no longer increased in its past, i.e. stagnated; the future, on the other hand, would be one that never began and would thus be void.

Such moments of an apparently lasting present can only be subjectively experienced via contemplation, meditation, (religious) rituals, hallucinatory drugs, absorption in intellectual, artistic or technical activities and in other practices that displace consciousness. Fashion consumer products can also procure an intensified experience of the present for the consumer. Fashion “as long as it is up-to-date, gives us [...] a stronger feeling of the present than any other phenomenon.”¹⁵³ If previously fashionable clothing is no longer worn by certain environments, it is no longer fashionable and thus no longer a topical fashion but a past one. The previous present-orientation of the fashion is now lost to the present and lies in the past. The fashion-conscious consumer no longer feels present but old-fashioned. He appears ‘past’ to himself. As obsolete fashion, fashion constantly undermines present-orientation, while the latest fashion always re-establishes it. New fashionable clothing thus apparently ‘ensures’ eternal presence in the present.

The religious person also seeks, via the *imitatio dei*, to gain participation in a never-ending present: During religious festivities¹⁵⁴ such a person steps out of linear, historical time into a holy mythical and cyclical time which takes part in eternity, “because it consists of an infinitely frequently

152 SIMMEL 1968, 207

153 SIMMEL 1996a, 197

154 BAUDRILLARD calls fashion and advertising a “feasts of consummation”. (1982, 143-144)

attainable eternal present”¹⁵⁵ To repeat rituals of myths means to be close to the gods and to the origin of time.¹⁵⁶ In an analogous way, the imitation of the lifestyles of prominent people aims at achieving proximity to these models. The *imitatio dei* becomes, in fashion, transformed and instrumentalised into the *imitatio prominentis*. Both intensify the feeling of the present. The imitator, by the act of imitation of the model, takes part in the model and his/her attributes. If a model makes use of new consumer goods (e.g. fashionwear) or changes a particular ‘lifestyle’, the imitator is forced to make a move if he or she wishes to continue to take part in the consumption and lifestyle of the model.¹⁵⁷

Before the democratisation of luxury, fashions changed via the social effects of imitation and delimitation; today, the cycles of fashion are established in seasons. Fashion has acquired the status of an *autopoietic phenomenon*. Any new fashion— according to Roland BARTHES – is defined in terms of the fashion of the previous year:

“Fashion experiences itself as a natural right of the present over the past. [...] In that absolute, dogmatic, vindictive present, in which fashion speaks, the rhetorical system has reasons at its disposal that seem once more to connect fashion with a less rigid and more long-term time – reasons that politely or with regret ignore the murder that fashion has perpetrated on its own past; as if it could hear from afar the possessive voice of the dead year that says to it: *Yesterday I was what you are now; tomorrow you will be what I am.*”¹⁵⁸

Fashion worn in the present claims to be the new or the newest fashion and yet it is a child of the past, because its creative process – seen from the period of time of its presentation or marketing – lies in the past. For this reason, fashion, which was created in the past, only takes part in the present or even the future for the consumer who is wooed with the aid of meta-goods.

155 ELIADE 1957, 53

156 Cf. ELIADE 1957, 53

157 The phenomena of imitation, symbolisation of affiliation and delimitation as the cause of changing fashions is discussed in detail in VEBLEN. Cf. VEBLEN 1997, 164–177 (Chap. VII)

158 BARTHES 1995, 279. The last sentence refers to the inscription on a gravestone.

Because of this, the present nature of fashion is based to a great extent on the presence of the commercial offer and the general wearing behaviour of certain environments, not in that of its creation – unlike an experimental artistic performance, where neither the observer nor the creator know what will emerge as a product. Apart from this, a person *feels* part of the present in the latest fashion because everyone else with such a point of view is consuming (buying and, if so, also wearing) this present fashion. In short, for the present nature of fashion – especially mass fashion – the actual wearing behaviour and not the procuring of it is the decisive factor. People – and here the aspects of theatricality and the present merge – ‘act’ the present with each other, for each other and for themselves with fashionable clothing that was created in the past. A fashion that has been created in the past kills a fashion that is just now and already no longer topical fashion, the creation of which lies even further back in the past. BARTHES notes: “*the present is constantly being ‘consumed’ by future fashion.*”¹⁵⁹ Fashion is “*an amnesic substitution of the past by the present.*”¹⁶⁰

Fashion is thus a manifestation of actual time and a structuring entity of time in general. It participates in the cyclic and the linear – as does time itself. On the one hand, fashion has a linear nature, because it constantly changes in lasting presence yet never returns to exactly the same point as it has once been, since its adopting new variations constantly permits changed nuances. On the other hand, fashion has a cyclic nature, because there is practically never something that is totally new in it and it is thus forced to contain recurring elements. Like human life, fashion seems in the long term to run in unpredictable courses, as neither humans or fashion ever return to precisely the same place at precisely the same time, since everything changes and flows – as HERACLITUS was already aware of.

Neither the cyclic, the linear nor the spiral aspects offer precise explanatory models of the course of fashion and human life. From a geometrical perspective, the spiral forms a line from a distant side view, but forms a circle from a ‘plan view’. So the spiral contains both the linear and cyclic aspects but does not transcend them, since it is held by both principles – the cyclic and the linear are equally immanent. Fashion evades both the strictly cyclic (since its styles seldom recur exactly as they were before) and the

159 BARTHES 1995, 349

160 BARTHES 1995, 296

linear (since fashion nearly always contains recurring elements) as well as the spiral, because it does not strictly observe these laws – otherwise it would be predictable, calculable and better marketable. This ‘chaotic’ nature – a long-term unpredictable *varatio* – makes fashion seem sympathetic to most of those dealing with it, as it contains something of the ‘non-fixed’ existence of human beings. And this makes it a constant novelty for man, who is a neophilic being.

Necrophobia and Neophilia – the new as a sign of life

“*Everything is in a state of flux,*” HERACLITUS says – man is a changing being in a changing world, so he must learn to love the changes if he is not to founder on them, whether it be changes in nature (weather, seasons, etc.) or in the ‘cosmos’¹⁶¹, in his social and professional surroundings, or changes that have to do with his advancing years or that are associated with changes of personality. Although man also appreciates constancy, after a certain time he grows “*weary even of the good and the convenient*”¹⁶² and strives to experience change, even if this can mean a worsening of his position.¹⁶³ Man’s striving for what is new at any one time is called neophilia: the *love of or friendly attitude towards the new*. Neophilia is the opposite of the love of preservation, loyalty, custom and tradition.

Costume is a sign of tradition, fashion a sign of the new. VISCHER puts this more polemically: “*Fashion is merely the sister of costume egged on by all the dogs of reform-madness.*”¹⁶⁴ As early as 1527 – according to Ulf POSCHARDT¹⁶⁵ – the reformer Philipp MELANCTON is said to have given a speech against the craving for fashion, which, like a poison of the new, causes customs, state and society to fall into ruin. In human nature, neophilia and the love of preservation constitute antagonistic motivators, the synthesis of which is seldom successful. Roland BARTHES recognises in

161 In both senses: *kosmos* understood as order within human life and as a world order.

162 GARVE 1987, 75

163 Cf. GARVE 1987, 57, 75 and 105

164 VISCHER 1979, 29

165 Cf. POSCHARDT 2001, 3

fashion a certain dialectic or synthesis between the chaotically new and a conservative, observable order:

“The new is thoroughly institutionalised, a purchasable value. In our society, however, it would seem that an anthropological function is assigned to a fashionable novelty, which despite all its ambiguity is well-defined: since it is unpredictable and systematic, regular and unknown, random and structured at one and the same time, it connects in a fantastic way the intelligible, without which man could not exist, with unpredictability, which one ascribes to the myth of life.”¹⁶⁶

The future content of fashion is unpredictable, unknown and random as long as no design exists, but the cycles of fashion and the design processes and advertising and marketing measures connected with it are systematic, regular and structured. The regular elements of fashion reflect their constant ‘form’ as a suprahistorical phenomenon and a psychological shimmer of duration, as SIMMEL refers to the lasting element of fashion.¹⁶⁷ The irregular elements of fashion are its changing contents. In connection with the changing contents of fashion, BARTHES talks of “*neurotic*” strivings of loyalty and disloyalty:

“As stated, fashion is systematically disloyal. Admittedly, loyalty (as sticking to the past) and disloyalty (as a destruction of this past) are equally neurotic, as soon as the former assumes the form of a compulsive or religious duty (of the Erynis kind) and the latter the form of a natural right to ‘life’.”¹⁶⁸

Fashion is a *sign* of ‘life’: For some consumers, for example, newly acquired clothing brings about a feeling of being restored; in many cases adverts talk about a feeling of being rejuvenated via new consumer products. The ‘disloyalty’ of fashion towards its previous content is acquired by the fashion phenomenon as a ‘form’ of the changing ‘materials’ in life. Fashion changes and moves like something that is alive. That which is alive basically changes and is in motion, while that which is not alive is not basically

166 BARTHES 1995, 310

167 SIMMEL 1996b, 34

168 BARTHES 1995, 349. By natural right BARTHES means a right that has so to speak become second nature.

in motion. According to ARISTOTLE, motion – kinetic, emotional and (in humans) intellectual – is one of the properties of the soul, which is the principle of life.¹⁶⁹ Via change, every motion basically includes something new. A love of life is often associated with a love of the new (although this does not exclude a love of preservation and even neophobia). Since the new is a sign of life and fashion always involves the new, fashion becomes associated with life. From a semiological point of view: Fashion is a signifier of the significatum ‘new’; signifier and significatum, fashion and the new, represent the sign ‘life’.¹⁷⁰

Neophilia is seen by some authors as an important cause of fashion and consumption. KANT relates the popularity of fashion to its novelty.¹⁷¹ And VEBLEN sees the “*preference of all humans for what is new at any given time*” as being responsible for the emergence of fashion.¹⁷² From a sociological point of view, the new in fashion consumer products is striven for because either a highly rated model (person or environment) is wearing the new feature or because unloved imitators have also acquired identical or similar products.¹⁷³ The phenomena of demarcation and the symbolisation of affiliation with the aid of fashionwear was already described by VISCHER prior to VEBLEN and they are thematised in economics by the cue-words *snob effect* and *hanger-on effect*. “[...] and so so-called fine society is constantly trying to think up new forms of clothing, ones that immediately have to be abandoned once more as soon as they are imitated by others, and this has led to a veritable witch-hunt for what is constantly new – which we now refer to as ‘fashion’ in the narrowest sense.”¹⁷⁴ For precisely these reasons, the dandy paradigmatically seeks for the new. Even so there is also a basic human disposition that approves of the new beyond its social effects. From a love of the new there is only a short way to a love of what is young. Because a young person has newer and fresher ‘resources’ at his or her dis-

169 The soul is the principle of life: the principle of motion, the capacity to nurture, to sense and (only in humans) to think. Cf. ARISTOTLE *PP* 411a-412a and 415a-416a.

170 I am here referring to the semiology of Roland BARTHES (1964, 93).

171 Cf. KANT 1988, 158 [AA 245-246]

172 Cf. VEBLEN 1986, 174

173 Described in detail in VEBLEN (1986, 164-183)

174 VISCHER 1879, 39

posal, compared with an elder person. Not only religious rituals can ‘renew’ the individual (e.g. confession); advertising for consumer products does so too: “*The new is thoroughly institutionalised, a purchasable value.*”¹⁷⁵

Before we begin to look at the paradigm of youthfulness, however, two further anthropological phenomena are to be related to fashion that especially play a role in economic calculations: preference for the present and myopia.

Preference for the present

HORACE’S “*carpe diem*” or “*praesens frui*” exhorts us to live completely in the present and to subordinate reflections concerning past and future to an enjoyment of the present.

Man has a preference for positive things that occur to him in the *present*. In the present, however, he does not profit from all the positive events of the past; were the positive event to happen to him in the future, it would be uncertain whether the positive occurrence really took place, since the future by definition is uncertain from the point of view of the individual. In economics, this phenomenon is referred to as *preference for the present*.¹⁷⁶ “*According to the law of preference for the present, a batch of goods in the present will be preferred to a batch of goods in the future.*”¹⁷⁷ A bar of chocolate that an individual received in the past or may receive in the future has, from the point of view of the present-centred individual, less value than one received in the present. If he had received the chocolate in the past, the whereabouts of the bar would be uncertain. Preferring the consumption of a bar of chocolate in the present to that in the past or the future corresponds to the rational calculation of *homo oeconomicus*.

Although economic thought, behaviour and action are components of the human, they are not the only action-guiding principle, as would seem to be implied by many reduced assumptions of neo-classical economics. *Homo oeconomicus* is an ideal type, a model. A *homo oeconomicus* would spread out the consumption of the bar of chocolate over time (we are as-

175 BARTHES 1995, 310

176 Cf. BARTMANN 1996, 227

177 SIEBERT 1978, 150

suming that this bar is imperishable) so that he could derive a maximum duration of lasting enjoyment from it. “*In the event of complete information concerning the future and a resource that neither grows nor perishes, a rational subject would arrange things in such a way that the marginal utility was equal at all times.*”¹⁷⁸ The marginal utility of a resource (e.g. chocolate) is the utility increase that occurs via an continued consumption of one after the other unit of this resource. This utility increase diminishes when the total consumption of the resource gets larger (Gossen’s first law¹⁷⁹). The first piece of chocolate grants a greater use increase than the tenth (like all such economic assumptions this is also ideal-typical, what usually occurs, although there are also numerous exceptions).

The bar of chocolate received in the future is, according to the law of preference for the present, less valuable than that received in the present. Because of this, a value equivalent of a goods in the future is included in economic calculations, which compare time-overlapping values with each other, that corresponds to its worth equivalent in the present. The method that helps ascertain the equivalent present amount of a future expenditure (income) is referred to as *discounting*.¹⁸⁰ By using discounting it is possible to compare batches of goods, amounts of money or utilities from different time periods with each other.¹⁸¹ From the point of view of ecological economics, as a result of the usual economic practice of discounting, an ethical problem arises concerning intergenerative justice which must be referred to here, although it cannot be dealt with in detail within the framework of the present investigation. It should, however, be noted that fashion consumer products, because of their swift periodical change, call for a considerable consumption of resources. From intergenerative justice perspective, which takes into account rights to resources of future generations, extensive consumption can only be represented as justifiable on the basis of the common practice of discounting used in standard economics.

In the following, a number of examples will be provided that would seem to argue in favour of including a preference for the present under *ra-*

178 HAMPICKE 1991, 198

179 Based on Hermann Heinrich GOSSEN (1810-1858)

180 Cf. CANSIER 1996, 119

181 Cf. STRÖBELE 1991, 151

tional calculation: productive investment of capital, diminishing marginal utility, uncertainty and risk of mortality.

In economic calculation, the productive investment of capital plays a decisive role in relation to a preference for the present: one Euro (€) *today* corresponds in the *future* to one € plus (compound) interest. For example, a present-day amount of €100, at a rate of return on investment of 10% p.a. corresponds to an amount of €110 in a year's time, i.e. instead of consuming €100 today, an 'economic subject' – via the 'productive investment' of capital – can consume for €110 in a year's time. Or conversely: If one can consume in the future for €110, this is equivalent to a discounted amount of €100 for present-day consumption.¹⁸²

A further rational reason for preferring goods in the present is diminishing marginal utility.¹⁸³ Someone who is interested in changing his workplace in the near future and who wishes to have a higher salary as a result of this new workplace, buys a new computer for himself, preferably on credit, when his old one cannot be used any more. By doing so, he redeploys to a higher level of consumption in the present, one that would not be justified until he first gets a higher salary in the future. Thereby he obtains a higher increase in utility by buying the new computer than if he had bought it in the future, where he would have found it easier to finance the purchase. For the marginal utility of the salary – the increase in utility that comes from an additional unit of income – diminishes when the salary increases.¹⁸⁴

An *existential* argument in favour of a preference for the present is uncertainty and one of its 'extremata': individual death. EPICURUS reminds us that the wise man lives in the present, he is not "*a master of what tomorrow may bring*". Since we need to "*remember that the future is neither ours nor wholly not ours: so that we cannot completely expect it as existing nor despair of it completely as not existing.*"¹⁸⁵ Death as an ultimatum is what first makes life capable of being enjoyed, for only in the finitude of existence is the worth of this existence recognised.¹⁸⁶ If life were to last for

182 Cf. CANSIER 1996, 119

183 Cf. STRÖBELE 1991, 151

184 In economics this situation is termed *the Gossen's first law* (after Hermann Heinrich GOSSEN (1810-1858)).

185 Both quotes: EPICURUS 1985, 45 and 83

186 Cf. EPICURUS 1985, 45

ever, the value of life would have to be portioned out in this endless period of time and the value of a single day in such a life would thus converge on 'nil'; the logical converse of this argument is that the value of a single day in life is greater the shorter life is. "*The anticipation of one's end permeates the depths of one's life. [...] The mere infinity of a temporal living-for-ever would destroy this experience. Everything that takes place would be meaningless, because it would lose its preciousness.*"¹⁸⁷ The finitude of existence and the assumption of less value of single days in a life that lasts forever have an implicit effect in practical choices made as to how one's life is to be organised, and they especially play a role when, for example, something like a 'deadline' or 'expiry date' is imposed on life because of an incurable disease, where the person affected places greater value on the time left to him and acts more consciously than previously in his life. Even when such a person, though not directly 'moribund', is aware of this *memento mori*, the value of life appears to be greatest in the present, since although death is certain, the time at which it will come is uncertain and death can overtake anyone as early as now or tomorrow. The finitude of individual human life is a possible explanation of how humans behave in the present. When an individual in his totality no longer finds himself in the present, he is dead. In terms of his physicality, a human being is chained to the present, in which he can live until the point where death puts an end to him and his present. Although a person does not consciously experience his own birth and, under certain circumstances, his own death, these two boundary situations¹⁸⁸ mark the temporal framework of his life, imposing a limit on the historical horizon that an individual can live through. In terms of thought

187 SPAEMANN 1996, 131

188 Karl JASPERS calls life situations that one cannot ultimately avoid 'boundary situations'. Such situations are, for example, death, suffering, struggle – but also ageing. "[...] *there are situations whose nature remains unaltered, even though their immediate appearance changes and their overwhelming power is concealed: I have to die, I have to suffer, I have to struggle, I am subject to chance, I inevitably become entangled in guilt. This basic situations of our existence we call boundary situations, i.e. situations that we cannot escape from, that we cannot change. Becoming aware of these boundary situations is, after the astonishment and the doubt, the profound origin of philosophy.*" JASPERS 1991a, 18; Cf. also JASPERS 1994, II, 204.

and emotions, a human being is indeed able to transcend the present and conceptually and emotionally to be involved in the past and the future, but the body is even so locked in the present, even though it would seem possible via cosmetic or anthropotechnical means to seemingly be returned to a past when that person was younger. Clothes can lead a person back into the past (via costume) or forward into the future (via futuristic garments) and thereby enable one to live being in the present especially intensely: a costume, for example, leads to an outer appearance and a partial recapturing of emotions and thoughts in the past whereby an individual can experience the here and now with special intensity. By using a combination of vestimentary, emotional and conceptual measures he can step out of the present into a past that can even lie outside the boundaries of his own life-span, the perception of actual historical time can be brought to a standstill.

In a contemplative, meditative, drugs-influenced state, or possibly one of mental derangement or at the moment of death, man looks as it were from a mountain top – that of the present – out into the vast surroundings – the past and future – of this mountain, without perceiving the mountain summit itself, intoxicated by the vastness of what surrounds it. Through contemplative experiencing and the coincidence of past and future, the present becomes particularly intense, but it is not perceived as a historical present, since it is seemingly standing still and amalgamated emotionally with *experienced* points or periods of time in past and future. Since this experience of past and present – or the experiencing of the fusing of all points and periods of time – are exceptional contemplative states, man usually simply perceives the momentarily experienced present and to a certain extent adapts to living in it. Admittedly, he does now and then look into the past and future, but such looks are more *side-glances* from the perspective of the present.¹⁸⁹

In order to adapt to living in the present, it is necessary now and then to look into the future and the past. Man looks into the past in order to process it, to reflect and to round things off – and in order to envisage consequences for the present and the future. Man has to look into the future so as not to be steamrollered by the present. When walking, a person is only ever able – in the moment of his existence – to touch the point of the road over which he

189 Apart from pathological forms that compel the person constantly to look back into the past.

at that moment finds himself. Even so, he occasionally looks back, recapitulates the part of the road already covered and from his actual position he nearly always looks ahead, to see what lies in front of him, the nature of the surface he is going to tread on in a moment's time, and what the road further ahead of him looks like.

From an individual point of view, the preference for the present – which is expressed in economics by the discounting rate – can be linked to the risk premium: a rate that policy holder would pay for the transfer of his risk on an insurance market.¹⁹⁰ Present benefits are here fundamentally valued as higher than future ones (e.g. because of possible risks). An uncertain benefit in the future corresponds to a *lesser* but *more certain* yield in the present. In an extreme case, the unforeseen death of the individual may occur (mortality risk), and he is unable any more to enjoy the benefits.¹⁹¹ When, for example, someone wishes to fulfil the dream of a lengthy, costly and adventurous journey and therefore – to carry out this journey – borrows money, by preferring the point in time of his journey he minimises the uncertainty of not perhaps being able to carry out this journey later because of advanced age or for occupational reasons. If he does not regret the journey and the money borrowed in that connection, then his decision – even considered *ex post* – was a rational one. For the usefulness that could have been derived from a later journey might be *less* (e.g. because of shorter leave from his work or physical infirmity) or even *zero* (if the journey was unable to be carried out in the planned manner), it is meaningful for the individual to assess the future usefulness as being less than the present one and therefore to undertake the journey now on credit. The interest on the credit corresponds to the premium that is paid for the minimising of the risk (the non-materialisation of the journey).

To sum up, it can be said that in general man prefers his existence and goods in the present (which does not exclude him, in exceptional situations, from wanting to be in the past or the future, and occasionally preferring to have goods and events in the past or the future, especially when these are of a negative nature). Fashion is a phenomenon of the present and of presence and it confirms the existence of the wearer in the here and now.

190 Cf. BRANDES 1997, 483-484

191 Cf. CANSIER 1996, 120

A problem that accompanies the theme of preferring the present is the paradigm of youthfulness, especially in Western societies, where age(ing) is undervalued and juvenility overvalued. Some members of Western societies – particularly elderly one – would prefer an existence in the past – in which they were younger than they are today – to one in the present. This phenomenon will be examined in more detail below. A problem immediately connected to preferring the present, however, is myopia, since it is a reason why fashionable items are repeatedly bought.

The economic paradox of myopia

Myopia (from the Greek *myōpos* = short-sighted) is the medical term for short-sightedness and metaphorically it also means ‘short-sighted’ thinking, behaviour and action that *ex post* is classified as irrational, especially in an economic context.¹⁹² Myopic thinking, behaviour and action is usually represented as an irrational factor in the economic process. From a profit-maximising perspective myopia is classified as positive – when it results in consumption. This form of consumption is often found among fashionable consumer products, especially fashionwear, whose path at times goes from the department store via the wardrobe to the old clothes collection, without once or regularly having been worn by the consumer.

A person who spends his entire month’s salary during the first week of the month and therefore has to limit himself for the remaining three weeks can just as well be categorised as myopic as the walker who has already consumed his entire week’s rations after three days and therefore has to ‘starve’ for the remaining four. In both these examples, the economic subjects in question consume their provisions ‘too early’ as a result of impatience and myopia. The walker and the wage earner *discount* the *future* use, because they place a higher value on the *momentary* in the *present*.

A necessary but insufficient condition for myopic behaviour is that it is regretted after the event.¹⁹³ When a myopic decision is taken, the longer-term future perspective is blocked out. When an act of consumption is regretted in hindsight, the obvious assumption is that we are dealing with *my-*

192 Cf. BARTMANN 1996, 66

193 For even behaviour that was considered to be rational in the prevailing context can be regretted after the event.

opic consumption.¹⁹⁴ The so-called ‘frustration buy’ and every form of compensatory consumption may be considered as myopic consumption. Compensatory consumption is that kind of consumption where an attempt is made to compensate for negative sensitivities – consciously or subconsciously – via consumption. Just as the clinically myopic patient sees distant objects unclearly (without glasses), the myopic consumer *overlooks* the perspective in the future as well as the hypothetical perspective back from the future to the act of purchasing. Myopia is an extreme variant of the preference for the present and a phenomenon that is opposed to sustainability. Myopia blocks out the rational perspective on the future and hypothetically back from the future onto the present in individual calculations. But myopic behaviour is an empirical fact, for it can be observed in everyone’s everyday life. To return to the two earlier examples: the wage earner normally regrets – at the latest during the last three weeks of the month – that he no longer has any money at his disposal during these weeks, and the walker is annoyed during the last four days of the week at his unrestrained appetite at the beginning of the week. Both wish, with the advantage of hindsight, that they had not behaved in such a myopic manner. For the myopic person regrets his conduct, since he actually always wants to have ‘a lot’ and only ‘momentarily’ accepts having less in the future.¹⁹⁵ Myopia in such contexts must not only be viewed as being irrational but also as being self-injurious and thus cannot be considered to be a economically meaningful way of behaving.¹⁹⁶

On the other hand, the idea of short-sighted pleasure exerts an almost subversive fascination which represents the epitome of a philosophy of myopic hedonism, as makes its appearance in such decadent figures and dandies as the WILDE character of Lord HENRY: “*Moderation is a fatal thing. Enough is as bad as a meal. More than enough is as good as a feast.*”¹⁹⁷ ARISTIPPOS’ dictum of reflective hedonism, “*Master of desire is not the one who avoids it but the one who knows how to make use of it without allowing himself to be carried away by it*”¹⁹⁸, is turned into its opposite in the light of

194 Cf. MEINHOLD 2001, 30

195 Cf. HAMPICKE 1991, 129

196 Cf. HAMPICKE 1991, 128

197 WILDE 1985, 177

198 HOSSENFELDER 1996, 50

myopic hedonism: *Master of desire is the one who has the courage to let himself be carried away by it: Only the person who is prepared to relinquish control over himself – and this trait is no longer that of the dandy – displays, according to the conviction of myopic hedonism – true steadfastness in the enjoyment of life. The highest form of pleasure, according to this view, occurs when one blocks out rational calculation, since sensuality determines the pleasures and rationality represents the Procrustian bed of pleasures experienced via the senses. Morality has no part to play in myopic hedonism – it prevents pleasure: “Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one’s mistakes.”*¹⁹⁹ Morality is not seen here as being a condition for bliss, as in the philosophy of ARISTOTLE or the Stoics – no search for happiness is actually undertaken. Nor is happiness, as in the philosophy of ARISTIPPOS the means to pleasure, but irrelevant: “*I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure.*”²⁰⁰ The myopic hedonist Lord HENRY convinces his ‘disciple’ Dorian GRAY of the power of sensual pleasure and the spiritualisation of the senses, as already consciously experienced by BARBEY D’AUREVILLY’s character DES ESSEINTES;²⁰¹ a new hedonism “*was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.*”²⁰² Since human life, seen from the perspective of eternity, only lasts a moment, thought, behaviour and action restricted to the moment are what lie for the myopic hedonist within his ‘rational’ art of living. Looking into the future is for such a person not rational, clever or wise but cowardly. “*Thin-lipped wisdom [...] hinted at prudence, quoted from that book of cowardice whose author apes the name of common sense.*”²⁰³

While the homo oeconomicus of standard economic shakes his head when looking at the myopic person, advertising sees in myopia an element of seduction. While a part of economics, basing itself on an examination of homo oeconomicus as its model, excludes myopia from standard economics and brands it as irrational – since in such economics *rational* economising

199 WILDE 1985, 44

200 WILDE 1985, 194

201 HUYSMANS, Joris-Karl (1978) *Against the Grain*.

202 WILDE 1985, 130

203 WILDE 1985, 64

of meagre resources is assumed in advance – advertising strategists as more holistic anthropologists include myopic hedonism as a component of human totality and the epitome of pleasurable consumption in their marketing concepts, which link ‘sinful’ meta-goods to economic goods: the consumer goods gains an ‘appetiser effect’ via a pinch of sin. The model of an advertisement for low-calory pudding announces: “*I’m a girl that simply can’t say no.*”²⁰⁴ Behind the irrationality of the consumer’s myopia lurks the seduction of the economic marketer.

According to BAUDRILLARD, the seduction oscillates between the poles of rationality and irrationality, between strategy and animality.²⁰⁵ This oscillation can be apprehended more sharply and collated with the economic subjects: Advertising strategists for fashion consumer items operate as *homines oeconomici* with human myopia as calculable anthropological constants, including them in the auxiliary conditions of their equations for maximising profit. On the supplier side, the rational subjugates the irrational as a means of maximising profit; on the consumer side, on the other hand, rationality is conquered by irrationality if the strategy of those who have subjected the irrational to the rational is successful. Particularly as regards fashion consumer items – the mental shelf life of which is longer than their fashionable topicality – it is necessary for the marketer to defeat *homo oeconomicus* with *homo myopicus*:

“[...] if the producers and buyers of clothing had an identical consciousness, it would only be able to be sold (and manufactured) to the extent it wore out, i.e. extremely slowly. [...] In order to dull the consciousness of the buyer it is necessary to spread out a veil of images, motifs and significances in front of the object, to dip it in a medium that belongs to the class of appetisers”.²⁰⁶

204 QUINN 2002, 86

205 BAUDRILLARD 1992, 123

206 BARTHES 1995, 10

The apotheosis of youth insignias

Youth is the only thing worth having.²⁰⁷

Myopic ways of thinking, behaving and acting – which occur among people of all ages, since they are a part of what is ‘human, all too human’ – are often negatively associated with a certain lack of life maturity. Statistically, the allegation ‘the younger the more myopic’ can probably be verified with a high degree of probability as a person only learns in the course of socialisation and on the basis of personal experience to integrate sustainable²⁰⁸ perspectives in his thinking, behaviour and actions.²⁰⁹ For precisely that reason, myopia is a sign of juvenility – “*To get back one’s youth one has merely to repeat one’s follies*”²¹⁰ – and juvenility and its signs have become a paradigm of advertising for fashion consumer items. What is fashionable is by definition topical and usually new, or, to express it in physical terms: ‘young’ – because a ‘new’ person is a young person. The consumer of a consumer product marketed in this way – the advertisement suggests – “feels as if reborn” or “youthfully fresh”.

A new consumer product is a sign of the new. A Platonist would say that new consumer goods participate in the Idea of the new. The new consumer product and indirectly also its consumer participate in this newness, just as the triangle drawn in the sand participates in the (Platonic) Idea of the triangle. What is old or worn, on the other hand, symbolises decay. Much-used clothing is then mainly worn in developed countries when it is fashionable. As a rule, clothing is put aside, however, before it is looks worn. “*By wearing [clothes] it is well known that something of ourselves is transferred into the items of clothing which, before they appear to be really defective, gives them a certain everyday, worn quality.*”²¹¹

207 WILDE 1985, 26-27

208 The concept of sustainability is not being used in its ethical-ecological sense here but in a broader sense.

209 If one ignores people who are not or no longer able to observe the aspect of sustainability, such as senile or mentally retarded individuals.

210 WILDE 1985, 44

211 SCHMITZ 1911, 89

Unlike green plants, whose brown leaves are removed for aesthetic or allegedly botanical reasons, clothing is normally disposed of before it shows the first signs of age. In fruit still lifes, fruit is seldom depicted as decayed, shrivelled up or dried out but normally as *fresh*, sometimes even provided with drops of moisture which, as a sign of freshness like the drops of dew of a new morning, slide down the ripe but not over-ripe fruit.

For people in modern societies the subject of death is taboo. What they prefer in life is its youth and freshness, not what is wrinkled and old: “*everything that has to do with age, disease, death, with insufficiencies and the deterioration of the body, with excretions and secretions*”²¹² is also avoided in advertising. Advertising makes a fetish out of youth, the attributes of which are made into ‘insignias’²¹³ of lifestyle, something which the cosmetics industry finally uses for the implantation of meta-goods in product advertising: unwrinkled, smooth skin, purity and cleanness. “*This porous skin with its holes and orifices [...] is negated in favour of a second skin that is non-porous, that has no emanations and excretions*”.²¹⁴ BAUDRILLARD relates the term ‘second skin’ to all possible concealments of human and non-human bodies, from make-up to skin-hugging clothing (e.g. body stockings) and protective coverings of synthetic materials and wax that elevate the body to a phallic fetish.²¹⁵ One does not have to agree with this interpretation along Freudian lines, but even so one cannot deny the practice of the flawless ‘packaging’ of physical and non-physical bodies with ‘cavity’-retouching ‘packagings’ in fashion, ranging from make-up that conceals pores and wrinkles via stockings and gloves that cover up signs of age to shrink-wrapped salads and cucumbers and even ‘non-food’ articles.

“This glazing of nakedness is similar to the obsession with which objects are provided with protective coverings of wax, plastic, etc., or with the brushing down, the cleansing that is meant to return them to a state of purity, of flawless abstraction –

212 KARAMASIN 1998, 292

213 E.g. Skin that is smooth and free of wrinkles, vigorous growth of hair in the ‘right’ places, no growth of hair in the ‘wrong places, juvenile physical figurativeness, freshness, power, potency, etc.

214 BAUDRILLARD 1982, 164

215 BAUDRILLARD 1982, 163-164

and that is thereby supposed to prevent their deterioration, so as to preserve them in a kind of abstract immortality.”²¹⁶

Cosmetic products ‘package’ the body’s skin even more immediately than clothing. Unlike the latter (the ‘second skin’), cosmetic products symbolically become new skin, or at least integrated physically into it. The skin experiences a rejuvenation via substances that are invigorating’, ‘refreshing’ (supposedly) hindering the ageing process, or even stopping or reversing it. Cosmetics lives off the human fear of age(ing), dying, death and their taboos. While age(ing), dying and death are made taboo, there is as it were, as a repressive effect, an apotheosis of youthfulness and its insignias. Women – according to WILDE’s character Lord HENRY – “*paint in order [...] look young. [...] As long as a woman can look ten years younger than her own daughter, she is perfectly satisfied.*”²¹⁷ The wish to appear younger is, however, no longer something specific to a particular gender – not, at least, in Western societies. Today, both sexes have approached each other under the verdict of beauty and youth. The sexes retire behind the synthesis of beauty and youth, which are proffered by advertising as paradigms to be imitated.

BAUDELAIRE opposes the Aristotelian view according to which art is (also) an imitation of nature²¹⁸: “*Who would dare to assign to art the fruitless task of imitating nature?*”²¹⁹ And thereby he also criticises the imitation of youth by people who are older: “*So one ought not – if one understands me aright – paint the face in the common, inadmissible intention of imitating nature and competing with youth.*”²²⁰ BAUDELAIRE instead, in anti-naturalistic style, proposed a “*praise of make-up*”²²¹ as he equates nature in an analogy with barbarism, cruelty and insufficiency, and culture with virtue, supernaturalness and artificiality.²²² To pursue this argument

216 BAUDRILLARD 1982, 164

217 WILDE 1985, 51. An exception is when young people use make-up in order to appear older.

218 Cf. ARISTOTLE *Poetics* 1448b 10-12

219 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 40

220 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 40

221 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 35-40

222 Cf. BAUDELAIRE 1988, 36-37

logically further: (aesthetic) natural insufficiencies of the body are to be “consolidated” and “made divine” via fashion and “the art of make-up”.²²³

“Woman is well within her rights, we may even say she carries out a kind of duty, in devoting herself to the task of fostering a magic and supernatural aura about her appearance; she must create a sense of surprise, she must fascinate; idol that she is, she must adorn herself, to be adored. So she must borrow from all arts the means of lifting herself up above nature [...]. In these considerations, the philosophical artist will easily find the justification of all those practices that have always been used by women to consolidate and, as it were, to make divine their fragile beauty.”²²⁴

BAUDELAIRE turns against pure naturalness, because “*nature can only advise crime*”²²⁵, as described all too clearly by DE SADE – who is revered by some, especially French, men of letter for his ‘honesty’ and his courage in presenting what is taboo. Alongside the beautiful, pure and young, DE SADE raises the revolting, dirty, impure, old and dead to the level of fetish and removes the taboo from themes labelled as such. In advertising these themes are furthermore not included, because advertising wishes to reflect the needs of the recipient. An advertisement by the cosmetics manufacturer Nivea which allowed the observer to associate the back of an elephant with her own un-creamed skin and made visible what uncared-for skin looks like did not catch on much with consumers. The advertisement offered in more recent relevant magazines by this manufacturer once more makes use of young, rosy skin, free of wrinkles and impurities as a sign of youth: “*the paradigm young/old is neutralised here in an immortal youth of simulation*”²²⁶. Cosmetic products refer yet more incessantly to the insignias of youth, which appear as meta-goods in the ads, than other fashionable consumer items. Fashion and fashion products are a sign of lifestyle and of life. Although ‘lifestyle’ – as used in present-day fashion magazines – has to be

223 Cf. BAUDELAIRE 1988, 39-40. Compare in this connection the precedence of the ‘artistically beautiful’ over the ‘naturally beautiful’ in HEGEL, which he justifies in Platonic fashion with the mind that is superior to nature and which gives birth to the artistically beautiful. Cf. HEGEL 1984, 14

224 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 38-39

225 BAUDELAIRE 1988, 36

226 BAUDRILLARD 1982, 64

translated as a *style of consumption*²²⁷, the concept ‘life’ implies and conceals a value-cosmos of meta-goods (or rather a ‘value-chaos’, for there is no *ordering* of values involved at any rate) which the consumer can apparently purchase by means of the consumer products. Youthfulness, or participation in youth, is only one of these meta-goods: “*And yet, who, that knew anything about life, would surrender the chance of remaining always young, however fantastic that chance might be, or with what fateful consequences it might be fraught? [...] And when winter came upon it, he would still be standing where spring trembles on the verge of summer.*”²²⁸ BARTHES sees in youth a counter-concept to gender, or a synthesis of gender: “*an ideal age which acquires ever greater importance in fashion literature: adolescence. Structurally speaking, it represents a complex term of the opposition between male and female, tending towards the androgynous [...] age, not sex, is the decisive thing.*”²²⁹ From an anthropological point of view, secondary sexual characteristics only emerge in adolescence, so that, on the one hand, it is only possible to speak of a differentiation and increase in physical deviation of the sexes after puberty. On the other hand, however, there is a conscious preference for the use of youthful, androgynous models in advertising certain products – certain perfumes and accessories, for example, but also products to do with insurances and banks: “*both sexes unite tendentially under a single sign, namely that [...] of youth.*”²³⁰

The reasons for the apotheosis of youth insignias in advertising are of a qualitative and quantitative nature: from an empirical-statistical point of view, the older person has less living time left than the younger. This longer time left at the individual’s disposal is viewed at least as a quantitative advantage. The younger person has, statistically speaking, a quantitative advantage over the older person when it comes to life-years. Qualitatively speaking, the younger person normally has newer physical resources than the older person at his or her disposal. In both respects – qualitative and quantitative – the younger person represents a model for the older person, one to be imitated. One method of imitation is via the consumption of goods that have connotations with youth insignias.

227 Cf. MEINHOLD 2001, 24-27

228 WILDE 1985, 106

229 BARTHES 1995, 264

230 BARTHES 1995, 346

“On the one hand, the youth of the model is constantly affirmed, one could say: defended, since it is being threatened by time [...] and therefore it has repeatedly to be stressed that all indications of time are measured by the yardstick of youth (still young/ever young). It is precisely this transience that lends youth prestige. [...] For that reason it is youth that is invested with prestige and seductive magic.”²³¹

Nothing is said in advertising geared to promoting youthfulness – especially advertising for cosmetic products – about the advantages of maturity (e.g. the developing of a wealth of experience and various competences), since such advertisements, in an anti-Platonic manner, are primarily directed towards the body. It is, however, usually the body whose beauty tends to decrease and the mind whose maturity tends to increase – at least until the individual’s final decline.

Immortal form – mortal content

Throughout life, the individual finds himself in the present and is unable to depart from this perception without anxiety. It is hard for him to comprehend no longer being in the present which, from his point of view, is always a part of him; to a much greater extent he has the feeling of ‘always’ being able to be in the present.

As a mortal being he not only strives for change (neophilia, cf. Chap. 2.3.2) but also for preservation and constancy, which pits an element of intransience against his own transience. A golden mean between efforts towards something always new and the preservation of what exists up to now does not take place without compromises and concessions, either in the life of the individual nor in families, environments, national, religious or cultural communities and societies. In the process of globalisation, the conflict between preserving and revolutionising energies is apparent at least at the local level,²³² when, for example, ‘new’ ‘Western’ styles of consumption clash with traditional non-Western values. A transition that takes place within a society can release the conflict between preserving and renewing conceptions of values in the individual. But even outside societal change the individual always stands between renewal and preservation – this starts

231 BARTHES 1995, 264

232 Cf. BOHLKEN 2003, 406-426

with daily considerations to do with dealing with such consumer goods as fashionwear – and does not end with attitudes of mind. Many people in Western societies wish at a certain age for their body to remain as it is now and not to be exposed to the ageing process, rather like the young Dorian GRAY, who expresses the wish that his portrait may age instead of him. Literature and art are full of youth-fountain portrayals, and religion contains myths of reincarnation and immortality. Man feels the urge to reproduce and conserve himself, his values and his works in number, space and time.

In PLATO's Symposium DIOTIMA instructs SOCRATES in this human urge towards the eternal: "*conception and generation are an immortal principle in the mortal creature.*"²³³ Human beings "*are pregnant both in the body and in the mind*"²³⁴, and it is in their nature from a certain age to (re-)generate. Love aims at "*generation and birth in beauty*"²³⁵, indeed – and this is why the popular use of the term Platonic love is erroneous – "*both in the body and in the mind*"²³⁶. Generation is an eternal moment, a statement of the immortal within the sphere of the mortal.²³⁷ And so love also aims at immortality.²³⁸

According to the Platonic view of humanity, the mind is immortal, whereas the body dies. "*a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age [...] he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation – hair, flesh, bones, blood, and the whole body are always changing. Which is true not only of the body, but also of the mind, whose habits, tempers, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears*".²³⁹ Because of this decline or change – for the old is replaced by the new – "*mortal nature is seeking as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal.*"²⁴⁰ For PLATO, love, which aims at generation and birth in the beautiful (for it does not strive for the ugly, but its opposite) is the basis of

233 PLATO *Symposium* 206 c

234 PLATO *Symposium* 206 c

235 PLATO *Symposium* 206 e. BAUDELAIRE calls the actual "*longing for beauty*" itself immortal (1988, 9).

236 PLATO *Symposium* 206 b

237 Cf. PLATO *Symposium* 206 e

238 Cf. PLATO *Symposium* 207 a

239 PLATO *Symposium* 207 e

240 PLATO *Symposium* 207 d

human striving for immortality: “*For that universal love and interest is for the sake of immortality.*”²⁴¹

The striving for immortality expresses itself, then, in two forms, depending on the person doing the striving. Present-day sociologists would say that the nature and aim of the striving are milieu-specific. Analogous to the Platonic dualism between the body and the mind, there exists a dualism when it comes to the source and goal of procreation. Both the body and the mind are capable of procreation. The simple person – according to PLATO – produces children, by means of which he or she participates in immortality, whereas the more ambitious person produces works, by means of which he or she becomes immortal for posterity. There is no doubt as to which type of procreation PLATO, as the creator of the theory of forms, prefers. Corresponding to his higher assessment of the mind as the better, intransient and immortal part of the human being, he also values products of the mind higher than those of the body: “*Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones?*”²⁴² Perhaps OVID was mindful of this idea when he wrote:

“And now the work is done, that [...] the gnawing tooth of time cannot erase. Let that day, that only has power over my body, end, when it will, my uncertain span of years: yet the best part of me will be borne, immortal, beyond the distant stars. Wherever Rome’s influence extends, over the lands it has civilised, I will be spoken, on people’s lips: and, famous through all the ages.”²⁴³

The works of fashion and of fashion creators and designers have achieved lasting fame in broad sections of society. Certain designers are themselves presented to a certain extent as timeless, time-independent, eternally young or semi-divine personages. Their works are not infrequently accorded the status of works of art that display an unchanging nature as articles of daily use. This ‘immortality’ or ‘longevity’ does not, however, gain a prominent role for fashion or the person wearing it, since many phenomena display such a longevity, from such natural phenomena as that of – from an anthro-

241 PLATO *Symposium* 208 b. Concerning the argument for immortality Cf. PLATO’s Dialogue *Phaido* 65b-105d

242 PLATO *Symposium* 209 c

243 OVID Naso: *Metamorphoses*, 871-Envoi.

po-centric view – eternity of the cosmos to the ‘immortality’ of human works.

By means of its constant occurrence as a social form of dress, one that has emerged in the course of history and not subsequently disappeared once more, fashion mediates this “*psychological shimmer of duration*”,²⁴⁴ that causes the onlooker to assume that the phenomenon is immortal.²⁴⁵ Although it is perfectly possible that fashion will disappear once more in sections of society in the course of history in favour of ecologically longer-lasting, recyclable, more or less standardised ‘uniforms’. Think, for example, of the forms of clothing that at first glance make it difficult to determine the societal status of their wearers because of their uniformity – such as men’s suits or school uniforms as worn, for example, in England, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Fashion lends its wearers a touch of immortality, since it enables them, via its periodical change, to partake in its ‘shimmer of duration’. By wearing new, fashionable clothing a person feels ‘newer’ or younger. Fashion appears to be an ideal synthesis of change and conservation. Via the changing of style (content) the form – fashion – is kept alive as a suprahistorical constant phenomenon. The change of fashion styles gives the fashion consumer the feeling of being constantly new and lulls him into believing in his own durability. Via periodic renewals it also conveys something which has the appearance of being cathartic. In this way, fashion apparently preserves youth, since it periodically surrounds the wearer with a new aura, by means of which he gains the impression of ‘being made new’ over and over again – an outward form of reinvestment.

Catharsis by reinvestment?

In the following an answer will be given to the question whether via reinvestment a catharsis can take place that expresses itself in a pleasurable, long-lasting ‘feel-better feeling’. A ‘repeated renewal’ feeling via new fashionwear would seem to suggest a therapeutic or quasi-therapeutic effect.

244 SIMMEL 2000, 34

245 Cf. also GARVE (1987, 107): He notes the “*unstoppable and never failing current of fashion.*”

In an analogy to the mind in the Platonic body-mind dualism, the *form* of fashion remains constant as a suprahistorical quasi immortal phenomenon, while its content changes with the seasons. The form – with fashion as a suprahistorical phenomenon – is as it were ‘immortal’, while the new content of fashion (designs, shades, materials) oust the old content with their appearance on the everyday social scene. Fashion ‘leaps’ – metaphorically speaking – revitalised ever again out of its coffin before death can nail down the lid. It is only able to do this because its content changes and it thereby becomes a new fashion. It “*titillates death and is once more a different, new phenomenon each time death looks about it in order to slay it.*”²⁴⁶

If one pursues further the analogy with the Platonic body-mind dualism, it is possible to observe in fashion a renewal of the content which is responsible for its constant form. The more constant phenomenon – in fashion the lasting form, and in PLATO’s anthropology the mind – is in fashion, as opposed to Platonic dualism, *dependent* on the changing and shorter-lasting aspect of fashion. Yet even seen from a Platonic perspective, an individual can only exist in the here and now *with* and *because of* his lesser ‘other half’. For that reason, an individual as a physical living creature, even from a strict Platonic point of view, is dependent on the body. The “*true philosopher*” according to PLATO – will despise “*beautiful clothes and shoes*” and will not turn to the body, the wrappings of the mind, but to the mind itself, and certainly not to clothes, which are the wrappings of the wrappings.²⁴⁷ A Platonist, one who adheres to the Platonic tenets not only in philosophy but in his life, would accordingly have to wear simple lasting clothes, or wear *out* such clothes and, as THOREAU says, we “*will never procure a new suit, however ragged and dirty the old – until we have so conducted that we feel like new men in the old.*”²⁴⁸

A “feeling new” – a form of catharsis – can, according to such views, not result from a renewal of the exterior, and yet this is precisely the aim of the fashion and body cult of Western societies. “*One of the main characteristics of lifestyle [...] would seem to be the preoccupation with the body.*”²⁴⁹

246 BENJAMIN 1989, B 1,4

247 Cf. PLATO *Symposium* 64d-65a

248 THOREAU 1979, 35

249 AMMICHT QUINN 2002, 83; Cf. also: MATTENKLOTT 1988, 231-252

Behind the (over-)emphasis on the body there is a certain anti-Platonism which, by turning to the body, seeks to purify the mind through the body. Lord HENRY's allopathic therapy maxim is: "*to cure the soul by means of the senses and the senses by means of the soul.*"²⁵⁰

Fashionwear as a second skin and wrapping²⁵¹, or cosmetics, are considered for strategic reasons along with the body as a unity and a totality. The body regenerates, renews or rejuvenates itself by means of new clothes, or some cosmetic substance. In product advertising the outer new wrapping (clothes, cosmetic product) is synthesised with the 'inner' ageing wrapping (skin, nails, teeth and hair, i.e. the first periphery of the body). The resulting synthesis profits from the newness of the 'second' skin. Advertising for fashion consumer products thus represents the individual as more of a whole than physical and mental allopathic medicine is able to treat him with. In doing so, advertising makes use of the stratagem of aligning the consumer product and its properties as closely as possible with human beings and establishing a connection. For example, a packet of detergent, which is meant to fulfil its functional task within the washing machine, is always kept close to the face of the 'showpiece female consumer' – the actress or the model used in the advertising. The person used in the ad/commercial shows her face along with the consumer product. This charges the detergent with meta-goods that, for example, also include human virtues and that merge the product with the consumer. The wash is not only clean but as pure as it is clean. This amazing degree of cleanliness is associated with the wash, the washer and the wearer. No detergent consumer demands virtuous purity from his wash, only cleanliness, although ethical 'purity' is not something humans despise. Consumer goods are thus linked with meta-goods, e.g. human qualities, especially virtue: cleanliness as purity, reliability, power, strength, potency, intelligence, beauty, health, freshness, newness as a symbol of youth, wit, humour, etc.

Advertising for consumer products defines the individual as a totality and continuum of spirit, mind, body *and consumer product*. The holistic principle – known from humanist psychology – is extended to include the

250 WILDE 1985, 181

251 "*Clothes are only our outer skin.*" THOREAU 1979, 35

consumer product that finds itself in the proximity of the individual.²⁵² The wrappings of the mind, the body according to PLATO, is merged with the second wrappings, clothes, with the cosmetic product and with consumer products in general to form a holistic but improved (meliorated) unity. The holistic principle of advertising amplifies the individual by a *second periphery* which does not merely represent a ‘repackaging’ but which becomes one with the *first periphery* (the outer visible dimension of the body: skin, hair, nails, teeth) and thereby with the individual as a whole. The characteristics of the consumer product apparently diffuse in the body that assimilates them: nutritional supplements strengthen one’s health and rejuvenate the body internally as well as externally – new hi-tech cosmetic products penetrate as a second periphery the first human periphery and regenerate, renew and rejuvenate it. New fashionable clothing as a second periphery renews, rejuvenates the first wrappings of the mind and of the individual as a holistic whole.

In certain (indigenous) societies a ritual oral intake of substances occurs that are thought to have a therapeutic, cathartic or invigorating effect, such as minerals, plants, parts of animals or humans (cannibalism), which are employed as magical, potency-enhancing means that strengthen both mind and body.²⁵³

Light can be shed on such practices as the eating of roots or the absurd, macabre consumption of parts of the human body – which, from a Western point of view, seems naive – by considering practices (just as naive, if not more so) that are common in our own modern society. Precisely in Western societies great numbers of therapeutic agents or ‘quack remedies’ are on offer, either at chemists’, organic food shops or from esoterics con-signers which claim to have an invigorating, beautifying and rejuvenating effect. There is only a short step from the offering of such substances, the effect of which is controversial from a nutritional and medicinal point of view,²⁵⁴ to

252 SIMMEL too talks of the “*unity and totality*” of the individual (SIMMEL 1968, 191; Cf. further concerning the concept of the individual as a totality: *ibid.* 1968, 189-193, 202, 206-209, 212, 232).

253 The ginseng root, for example, is considered an aphrodisiac and life-lengthening supplement in China: jênshên: man(like) root; the Chinese ideogram is the same as that for virility.

254 Cf. WOLTERS/HAHN 2001, 367-375

creams, colours and sun-glasses that aesthetically enhance the face by means of emphasising the shape of the body (high heels, shoulder and bra pads) and retouching fashion articles (scarves, stockings, sun-glasses, etc.) which, along with an improvement of one's exterior are also meant to bring about a holistic melioration – to diminish mental drawbacks, for example. It is possible that height increase by means of high heels can also lead to an increase in self-confidence. Self-confidence can also be enhanced by wrinkle-concealing stockings and shawls, broadening and shaping pads at all conceivable locations of the body as well as by 'cool' sun-glasses or other fashionable accessories. Consumer products that enhance one's self-confidence even extend to 'potency enhancing' wide-base tyres and exhausts, which are normally presented by 'summer'-clad models in relevant car accessories catalogues. The influence of new consumer goods on living conditions should therefore not be underestimated.

If one takes the analogy of the Platonic body-mind dualism presented earlier in this chapter to its conclusion, the interior of the first periphery is surrounded by a renewed exterior, namely with the synthesis of the first and second peripheries. This process is like a reincarnation, because a relatively constant interior is transferred into a renewed exterior, or because a renewed exterior clothes a constant interior. Just as in reincarnation an immortal soul is reborn into a new physical and mortal body, an individual in reinvestigation transfers himself into new clothing. *"The new shirt lies spread out anyway like the new day, a new coat covers [...] everything. [...] Even women put on a new part of themselves when they put on a garment. She is someone else in another dress [...]. Others immediately feel they are wrinkle-free when their stocking is."*²⁵⁵ In a metaphorical, figurative sense the individual is reborn in a new vestment, the newness of which diffuses as a new part of the 'whole' person and is assimilated by him. The individual as a 'holistic whole' has become a new person, or at least a renewed one. He has 'reinvested' or pseudo-reincarnated himself.

In the following, we will return to catharsis and raise the question of the extent to which reinvestigation involves a 'feeling new' aspect, i.e. a kind of purification or catharsis. But this procedure, resulting from the apparent synthesis of the second human periphery (clothes) with the first one (skin) – and the assimilation of the new into the individual as a holistic entity –

merely represents a simulation, however, since the merging of the first and second periphery is itself only a simulation, as an individual and consumer item are unable to form a holistic entity in the sense of a continuity. As a result of reinvestigation there merely follows a pseudo-catharsis: the renewal of the second periphery involves an *apparent* renewal and purgation of the first periphery (or the whole person), as a result of the synthesis of the first and second periphery. The pseudo-catharsis is strengthened when the fashionable consumer product that is to be acquired is represented by a model which the consumer in the course of an *imitatio prominentis* imitates via his new consumer product.

Fashion thus opposes the natural death of the individual, as advertising links it with meta-goods that for example symbolise rejuvenation, occasionally (implicit) immortality and, in extreme cases, reincarnation. The advertising of cosmetic products in particular often creates the impression of being able to ‘rejuvenate’ the consumer; the consistent use of the product must be able – if one logically pursues the message of the advertising – at some point to reincarnate the consumer. Goods that prevent the process of ageing would, if used consistently and frequently, lead to an end of decline and thus – if taken to the logical extreme – to immortality.

Because of fashion’s relation to the present, but also because of the apotheosis used in advertising of youth insignias as a sign of the fresh, new and young, and finally not least because it reflects myopic consumption, it also has to be divested of a form of repression and tabooing of decline, ageing, dying and death. Walter BENJAMIN writes that “*this age does not want to know of death*”²⁵⁶ and “*fashion mocks death*”²⁵⁷. Death is portrayed in fashion as if it had been “*abolished*”²⁵⁸. In the pseudo-tragedy of fashion, death plays a subordinate and resurrection the predominant role, since the newly rising fashion always kills the old one and thus “triumphs”. Fashion means living in the present, it eliminates ageing. It only allows death in the elimination of old-fashioned content – as an element of reinvestigation. Seen from the perspective of dramatic tragedy, it only employs death to eradicate its old content in order to remain alive as form via new content.

256 BENJAMIN 1989, B 2,4

257 BENJAMIN 1989, B 2,4

258 BENJAMIN 1989, B 9,2

In the use of synthetic fibres fashion reaches its material zenith: fashionable clothes made from synthetic fibres, because of its material it symbolises both immortality and re-birth: a textile surface made of robust synthetic fibres potentially outlives the buyer, who is made of decomposing material; from the buyer's perspective it is 'not mortal'. The article of clothing will, however – because of a change of the aesthetic paradigm in fashion – be disposed of *before* it is worn out, and if correspondingly treated and designated will finally be recycled. Recycling is a re-birth of the material in the form of a new consumer product. Thus fashion, since the invention of synthetic fibres, also opposes death at the material level – twice over.

Fashion marketing follow apotheoses of youth insignias, of prominent figures and, with their help, of the staging of brands. Just as the *imitateo dei* leads to the eternal return to the sources of the sacred models and saves human existence from death and the void, so does the *imitatio prominentis* appear to safeguard the fashion consumer from meaninglessness, as the advertising of fashionable consumer products links the lifestyle of the prominent figures as meta-goods with consumer goods, causing the consumer to believe that via the imitation of one's "betters" one is able to partake in the better "as such" and thereby improve oneself and one's life. And yet neither the simulated renewal of the individual through fashion and the new fashionable consumer products nor the imitation of one's betters leads to a lasting "feel-better feeling" in the individual: A healing catharsis via fashion alone is out of the question.