

## Body, World and Dress: Phenomenological and Somaesthetic Observations on Fashion

Stefano Marino  
University of Bologna

### Abstract

Hilary Putnam introduced the idea of the threefold relation between mind, body and world that it is necessary to take into consideration to adequately account for human perception and understanding. Recent philosophical debates on aesthetic practices that are characteristic of the present age have paid great attention to the fundamental role played by the body in our world-experience and, in case of the aesthetics of fashion (as part of the investigation of aesthetic experiences that have acquired an extraordinary power and significance in today's widely aestheticized world), also to the essential role played by dress to understand the human beings' particular relation to their own bodies. In this article, I first offer a general overview on the often problematic but nevertheless intriguing relationship between fashion and philosophy, and on the importance of the body/dress relation in the work of some relevant fashion theorists. Then, I focus on the contribution of Eugen Fink who inquired into fashion with great interest and accuracy, understanding it as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and connecting it to other fundamental topics of investigation like the body and play. Finally, I show how these questions, and especially that of the central role played by the body in all aspects of our world-experience (where the body is understood as both a natural and cultural entity, or even as the place in which nature and culture intersect themselves), are also crucial in the philosophy of Richard Shusterman, and how the latter's reflections can be fruitfully compared to Fink's abovementioned phenomenological investigation of the significance of clothing and fashion.

**Keywords:** aesthetics of fashion, embodiment, phenomenology, pragmatism, Eugen Fink, Richard Shusterman

### I.

In recent debates on aesthetic practices, experiences and dimensions that are characteristic of the present age, and that have acquired an extraordinary power and significance in

shaping our *sensus communis aestheticus* in today's widely aestheticized world<sup>1</sup>, one of the main fields that have emerged is the aesthetics of fashion. Moving from the pioneering contributions on fashion of such thinkers as Simmel, Veblen or Benjamin, and also from more recent philosophical-sociological writings by such authors as Barthes, Baudrillard, Bourdieu and Lipovetsky, several original and important works on this topic have appeared in recent times<sup>2</sup>. This clearly testifies, also with regard to fashion, the general need to overcome what Richard Shusterman has called “the narrowness of [a certain] dominant conception” (Shusterman 2000, 140) in aesthetics and to broaden this field beyond the limits of the traditional philosophy of fine arts. As has been noted, in order to develop an adequate understanding of the present aesthetic situation it is important to take into account

the essential difference between the traditional reference points of aesthetics and the reality we effectively experience today. According to what we may define the aesthetic common sense, grounded on a traditional conception of art, the latter represented a noble and refined domain designated to shape people's taste in certain institutional circumstances in which everyday life was somehow interrupted or suspended (as it still happens today in museums, art galleries, concert halls, theaters, and academies). But the dynamics presiding over the shaping and education of taste today are vice versa nearly completely coincident with those experienced in our “high-aesthetical” everyday lives, namely in the “aestheticized reality” that represents the ideal setting for the cultivation and diffusion of processes that are primarily embodied by fashion. It is not coincidental that the difference between art creations, entertainment performances, and fashion events has grown increasingly imperceptible as far as both the participants to the events, the logic underlying them, the way they take place, and finally the institutional settings of these happenings, are concerned (Matteucci 2016, 50).

With regard to fashion, already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Georg Simmel had understood and made explicit that “the *increased* power of fashion [had] overstepped the bounds of its original domain, which comprised only externals of dress”, and had now acquired “an increasing influence over taste, theoretical convictions, and even the moral foundations of life in their changing forms” (Simmel 1997, 193). About one

hundred years later, this has been acknowledged by many other theorists. For example, according to Lars F. Svendsen,

[f]ashion has been one of the most influential phenomena in Western civilization since the Renaissance. It has conquered an increasing number of modern man's fields of activity and has become almost 'second nature' to us. So an understanding of fashion ought to contribute to an understanding of ourselves and the way we act. [...] Fashion affects the attitude of most people towards both themselves and others, [...] and as such it is a phenomenon that ought to be central to our attempts to understand ourselves in our historical situation [...]. [A]n understanding of fashion is necessary in order to gain an adequate understanding of the modern world. (Svendsen 2006, 7, 10)

However, notwithstanding the great importance for the human being of clothing and fashion, there has been until recent times a general tendency to ignore them and to neglect their intellectual and institutional significance. Indeed, "the study of fashion is of recent origin", and it took quite a long time "before fashion became a legitimate research topic for scholars, including social scientists" (Kawamura 2005, 6). An interest in fashion as a topic arose during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century "fashion and/or clothing as a research topic have never been popular": the scholars involved in the field of fashion studies often had and still have to face "the academic devaluation of fashion as a topic" (Kawamura 2005, 8).

As noted by Elizabeth Wilson, fashion has been "constantly denigrated" and therefore "the serious study of fashion has had repeatedly to justify itself": "all serious books about fashion seem invariably to need to return to first principles and argue anew for the importance of dress" (Wilson 2003, 47, 271). If this is true for the field of social and human sciences in general, it is even more valid for and appropriate for the specific field of philosophy. If we set aside a list of literary and essayistic writings of poets and novelists, intellectuals, artists or moralists<sup>3</sup>, and if we limit ourselves to works that can be considered as strictly philosophical and undoubtedly belonging to the academic domain of philosophy, it becomes difficult to avoid the impression of a veritable "philosophic fear of fashion" (see Hanson 1993). A philosophical fear, the latter,

that is mostly connected to squeamishness about the body as an object worthy of intellectual attention (Pappas 2016a, 87n).

Of course, it is possible to come up with a list of philosophers who have provided sometimes only short and episodic remarks on fashion but occasionally instead extended analyses and systematic observations about it<sup>4</sup>. However, notwithstanding the existence of a minor but interesting tradition of philosophical perspectives on fashion, it is difficult to deny that, in general, “fashion has been virtually ignored by philosophers, possibly because it was thought that this, the most superficial of all phenomena, could hardly be a worthy object of study for so ‘profound’ a discipline as philosophy”: in short, fashion “cannot at any rate be said to be a fashionable theme in philosophy”, it has not been “considered a satisfactory object of study” (Svendsen 2006, 7, 17). Anyway, as observed by Nickolas Pappas, “sooner or later everything comes to interest philosophy”; if, on the one hand, “there is a view of the field according to which philosophy once encompassed every inquiry and went on to lose parts of itself one by one as each field saw how to be scientific”, on the other hand there is also a view of the field according to which “philosophy’s curiosity continues to seize on more of what is said and done and not yet brought into philosophy’s consciousness”: if it was “relativity a century ago”, perhaps “it’s brain science and film today” (Pappas 2016a, 73) – and also fashion, we could add.

## 2.

As noted by Elizabeth Wilson, dress “links the biological body to the social being, and public to private”, and this “makes it uneasy territory”: in fact,

it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than a biological entity, It is an organism in culture, a cultural artefact even, and its own boundaries are unclear. [...] If the body with its open orifices is itself dangerously ambiguous, then dress, which is an extension of the body yet not quite part of it, not only links that body to the social world, but also more clearly separates the two. Dress is the frontier between the self and the not-self. [...] In all societies the body is ‘dressed’, and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles. Dress is always ‘unspeakably meaningful’. [...] Dress in general seems then to fulfill a

number of social, aesthetic and psychological functions; indeed it knots them together, and can express all simultaneously. This is true of modern as of ancient dress. What is added to dress as we ourselves know it in the West is fashion. The growth of the European city in the early stages of what is known as mercantile capitalism at the end of the Middle Ages saw the birth of fashionable dress, that is of something qualitatively new and different. Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles. Fashion, in a sense is change, and in modern Western societies no clothes are outside fashion (Wilson 2003, 2-3).

From this point of view, inasmuch as dress immediately covers the surface of our body and thus presents it to the world as “never naked” but rather “always dressed”, thus representing something like a “second skin” (see Entwistle 2000) for such “second-nature animals”<sup>5</sup> as the creatures that we are, clothing (and fashion, since the modern age) is clearly connected to the bodily dimension of human life. Indeed, understanding the phenomenon of clothing even appears as indispensable to adequately account for the particular relation that human beings normally have with their bodies throughout their life. Now, together with some recent developments of pragmatism like somaesthetics – the new disciplinary proposal introduced by Richard Shusterman and defined as “the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation [*aisthesis*] and creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman 2000, 267) –, the philosophical tradition that has probably paid the greatest attention to the rehabilitation of the embodied constitution of the human world-experience as such is phenomenology. From Husserl until today, investigating the body has represented a major goal of inquiry in the phenomenological tradition that has shown the body’s “ontological centrality as the focal point from which our world and reciprocally ourselves are constructively projected” (Shusterman 2000, 270-271)<sup>6</sup>.

As has been noted, the “denial of the cognitive significance of the body has a long tradition”, stemming from Plato and arriving to the present age, inasmuch as “a disembodied view on the mind was also found in classical cognitive science” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 131). However, “an alternative philosophical backdrop” or “alternative approach” to the perhaps still prevailing but inadequate

conceptions of the mind/body and mind/world relationships “is alive and well”, and has been “worked out in the phenomenological views” of various philosophers who attempted to “dig deeper into the meaning of embodiment, how it situates us and how it shapes our cognitive experience” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 134). So, in general, according to phenomenological investigations of the body, the latter is not “one object among others” but rather

is considered a constitutive or transcendental principle, precisely because it is involved in the very possibility of experience. It is deeply implicated in our relation to the world, in our relation to others, and in our self-relation, and its analysis consequently proves crucial for our understanding of the mind-world relation, for our understanding of the relation between self and other, and for our understanding of the mind-body relation. The phenomenological emphasis on the body obviously entails a rejection of Cartesian mind-body dualism. But it should be just as obvious that this does not entail an endorsement of some kind of Cartesian materialism. It is not as if the phenomenological way to “overcome” dualism is by retaining the distinction between mind and body, and then simply getting rid of the mind. Rather, the notion of embodiment, the notion of an embodied mind or a minded body, is meant to replace the ordinary notions of mind and body, both of which are derivations and abstractions. [...] The lived body is neither spirit nor nature, neither soul nor body, neither inner nor outer, neither subject nor object. All of these contraposed categories are derivations of something more basic. [...] The body is not a screen between me and the world; rather, it shapes our primary way of being-in-the-world. [...] Moreover, all of [the] aspects of embodiment shape the way I perceive the world. [...] Since this is the lived body with which I perceive and act, it is in constant connection with the world. And this connection is not a mere surface-to-surface contact, as a corpse might lie on the surface of a table; rather, my body is integrated with the world. To be situated in the world means not simply to be located someplace in a physical environment, but to be in rapport with circumstances that are bodily meaningful (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 135, 137).

In my view, this can be easily connected to some developments in the abovementioned field of somaesthetics, as testified for example by Shusterman’s book *Body Consciousness*, where we read:

The term “soma” indicates a living, feeling, sentient body rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation, while the “aesthetic” in somaesthetics has the dual role of emphasizing the soma’s perceptual role (whose embodied intentionality contradicts

the body/mind dichotomy) and its aesthetic uses both in stylizing one's self and in appreciating the aesthetic qualities of other selves and things. [...] If embodied experience is so formative of our being and connection to the world, if (in Husserl's words) "the Body is [...] the *medium of all perception*", then body consciousness surely warrants cultivating, not only to improve its perceptual acuity and savor the satisfactions it offers but also to address philosophy's core injunction to "know thyself" [...]. The body expresses the ambiguity of human being, as both subjective sensibility that experiences the world and as an object perceived in that world. A radiating subjectivity constituting "the very centre of our experience", the body cannot be properly understood as a mere object; yet, it inevitably also functions in our experience as an object of consciousness, even of one's own embodied consciousness. [...] I thus both *am* body and *have* a body. I usually experience my body as the transparent source of my perception or action, and not as an object of awareness. It is that *from which* and *through which* I grasp or manipulate the objects of the world on which I am focused, but I do not grasp it as an explicit object of consciousness, even if it is sometimes obscurely felt as a background condition of perception. But often, especially in situations of doubt or difficulty, I also perceive my body as something that I *have* and *use* rather than *am*, something I must command to perform what I will but that often fails in performance, something that distracts, disturbs, or makes me suffer (Shusterman 2008, 1-3).

### 3.

Far from being irrelevant for an aesthetics to fashion, what has been said above about the phenomenology of the body proves to be very important, because not so many philosophers, in general, have addressed fashion as a subject of inquiry, and because even among those philosophers who have, not so many really took into consideration the body/dress relationship. A relationship, the latter, that is of fundamental importance to adequately account for both dress as a sort of "second lived body" and fashion as an essential aesthetic practice. A relevant exception to this mainstream is precisely represented by a phenomenologist, and indeed a very important one: Eugen Fink, emphatically defined by Husserl himself as "the greatest phenomenon of phenomenology" (Husserl, quoted in Moore and Turner 2016, 1). In fact, in his 1969 book entitled *Mode: ein verführerisches Spiel* Fink investigated clothing and fashion with great interest and accuracy, connecting them to the basic anthropological structure of the human being.

If Fink's entire path of thinking can be divided into different phases (as argued for example by Simona Bertolini, an expert scholar of Fink who has distinguished three steps or phases in Fink's *Denkweg*) (see Bertolini 2012), then his short but remarkable book on fashion from 1969 must be placed in the context of the late phenomenological-anthropological development of his philosophy, especially focused on play (*Spiel*) and world (*Welt*)<sup>7</sup>. As Fink explains in another short but fundamental work, *Oase des Glücks*, "play is not a marginal manifestation in the landscape of human life" but it rather "belongs essentially to the ontological constitution of human existence": play "is an *existentiell*", "a fundamental phenomenon of existence, just as primordial and independent as death, love, work and ruling"; it is "a phenomenon of existence of an entirely enigmatic sort", "a fundamental possibility of social existence", "an intimate form of human community", or even "the strongest *binding* power. It is community-founding" (Fink 2016, 15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 27). For Fink, playing

is always a confrontation with beings. In the plaything, the whole is concentrated in a single thing. Every instance of play is an attempt on the part of life, a vital experiment, which experiences in the plaything the epitome of resistant beings in general. [...] [W]e must distinguish between the real human being who "plays" and the human role within the instance of play. [...] In the enactment of play, there remains a knowledge, albeit strongly reduced, about [the player's] double existence. It exists in two spheres [...]. This doubling belongs to the essence of playing. All the structural aspects touched on until now come together in the fundamental concept of the *playworld*. Every sort of playing is the magical production of a playworld. [...] The playworld is an imaginary dimension, whose ontological sense poses an obscure and difficult problem. We play in the so-called actual world but we thereby attain (*erspielen*) a realm, an enigmatic field, that is not nothing and yet is nothing actual. [...] [T]he imaginary character of the playworld cannot be explained as a phenomenon of a merely subjective appearance, nor determined to be a delusion that exists only within the interiority of a soul but in no way is found among and between things in general. The more one attempts to reflect on play, the more enigmatic and questionworthy it seems to become. [...] The relation of the human being to the enigmatic appearance of the playworld, to the dimension of the imaginary, is *ambiguous*. [...] The greatest questions and problems of philosophy are lodged in the most ordinary words and things. The concept of appearance is as obscure and unexplored as the concept of

Being and both concepts belong together in an opaque, confusing, downright labyrinthine way, permeating one another in their interplay. [...] Play is creative bringing-forth, it is a production. The product is the playworld, a sphere of appearance, a field whose actuality is obviously not a very settled matter. And nevertheless the appearance of the playworld is not simply nothing. [...] The playworld contains [both] subjective elements of fantasy and objective, ontic elements. [...] Playing is finite creativity within the magical dimension of appearance. [...] Human play is (even if we no longer know it) the symbolic activity of bringing the sense of the world and life to presence (Fink 2016, 23-26, 28-30).

Fink's philosophical conception of fashion – that also pays great attention to the relevance of the body/dress relation, as I said – must be contextualized within his more general theory of the central role “played” by play in the whole of the human existence. This is confirmed by a few strategic passages of *Mode: ein verführerisches Spiel*, where Fink employs the concept of play to explain what fashion really is in its very “essence”, i.e. also from an ontological point of view concerning the *Seinsrang* or *Seinssinn* of this phenomenon. Inasmuch as it belongs to the sphere of play that, in turn, is part of what Fink calls “the decisive fundamental phenomena of human existence”, fashion proves to be extremely useful also from a philosophical point of view. Indeed, fashion proves to be a phenomenon that can allow us to better grasp some of the significant aspects of human existence already emphasized by Fink with regard to play, such as the status of appearances, the relevance of appearances for the life of a community or society (and hence also the question of so-called social appearances<sup>8</sup>), and the complex, polysemous, multidimensional and fundamentally ambiguous relation of the human being to his/her body and the world.

#### 4.

Starting from the question concerning the particular nature of the human being, in his book on the aesthetics of fashion Fink significantly defines the human being as “a player”<sup>9</sup>; as a peculiar, odd animal that unites in itself nature and freedom, impulse and rationality; as “a curious creature” that “is condemned to self-organization and self-formation”<sup>10</sup>. It

is in this context that the fundamental significance of play for the human being (and, arising from this, the “playful” character of fashion itself) emerges. Fink is quite explicit on this point, and in fact he says that fashion relies on “the free play-impulse of the human being”: for him, “fashion belongs to the realm of freedom and play” and, from this point of view, developing an adequate understanding of what fashion actually is represents “a cultural-pedagogical task of the first rank, in order to gain a self-comprehension of the human being as a player” (Fink 1969, 90, 96, 113). This also leads Fink to understand fashion as belonging to the dimension of sociability and free time or leisure: a question, the latter, to which he dedicates many pages and remarks in his book<sup>11</sup>.

What is remarkable in Fink’s investigation of fashion is also his capacity to provide a non-reductionist approach: namely, an approach that is able to avoid the reduction of such a complex phenomenon to a single and supposedly simple principle, aspect or element, and even to recognize fashion as a human activity whose antinomical essence, so to speak, consists in being one thing and at the same time the opposite. This makes it possible, for example, to explicitly compare his phenomenological approach to fashion to Georg Simmel’s understanding of fashion as grounded at one and the same time on the twofold drive toward imitation and differentiation (both individual and collective), or even as peculiarly suspended or oscillating between being and not-being. For Simmel, fashion

possesses the peculiar attraction of limitation, the attraction of a simultaneous beginning and end, the charm of newness and simultaneously of transitoriness. [...] Fashion is [...] imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation; it leads the individual onto the path that everyone travels, it furnishes a general condition that resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time, and to no less a degree, it satisfies the need for distinction, the tendency towards differentiation, change and individual contrast. [...] Hence fashion is nothing more than a particular instance among the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in a unified act the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and variation. [...] Connection and differentiation are the two fundamental functions which are here inseparably united, of which one of the two, although or because it forms a logical contrast to the other, becomes the condition of its realization (Simmel 1997, 188-192).

With regard to the question of the unique character of the human being, Fink stresses the latter's particular relationship to its body and, connected to this, the central role played by dress precisely in its relationship to the body<sup>12</sup> (including, among other things, the fashion/sexuality relationship)<sup>13</sup>. In doing so, i.e. in claiming that our existence is constitutively embodied, that we are world-open in an embodied way, that reality is bodily disclosed to us, and that the human body is not a thing but is rather the human being's effective reality, Fink clearly relies on insights into the dual dimension of our bodily life – namely, into the dual way we can refer to our own body both as *Körper* (an objective body, i.e. a mere object, a thing among things examined from a third-person perspective) and as *Leib* (a lived body, the body of a living organism experienced from a first-person perspective) – that have characterized to a great extent the development of phenomenological philosophy. An insight, the latter, that has also been paid great attention to by Richard Shusterman in the context of his latest developments of somaesthetics, for example when he claims that,

if somaesthetics has introduced the term “soma” to distinguish the living, sentient, purposive human body from the lifeless bodies of corpses and all sorts of inanimate objects that are bodies in the general physical sense, this does not preclude the term from having its own rich ambiguity. Embracing both the mental and the physical, the soma is both subject and object. It is the bodily, sensory subjectivity through which we perceive things, including the soma itself as a bodily object in the world. It thus straddles both sides of the German phenomenological distinction between *Leib* (felt bodily subjectivity) and *Körper* (physical body as object in the world). If Helmut Plessner described the self as *being* a *Leib* while *having* its body as object (*Leibsein* and *Körperhaben*), then somaesthetics takes its task as understanding and cultivating the soma as both perceiving subject and expressive object, as being both what it is and ineluctably has. [...] Besides its complexity as both subject and object in the world, the soma embraces other ambiguities. It exemplifies the ambiguity of human existence as both shared species-being and individual difference. Philosophers have emphasized rationality and language as the distinguishing essence of humankind. But human embodiment seems just as universal and essential a condition of humanity. [...] The soma reveals that human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture (Shusterman 2019, 14-15).

Once again, far from being irrelevant for the specific purposes of a philosophical inquiry into fashion, the phenomenological conception of *Körper* and *Leib* rather proves to be essential, inasmuch as it also opens up the possibility of a general rethinking of the body/dress relationship (“*Verhältnis von Kleid und Leib*”, in Fink’s own words) (Fink 1969, 102). In fact, clothes serve as a cover, as a protection for the human being, but also (if not in the first place) as a proximate, “close-to-the-body” means of expression (see Fink 1969, 50). What emerges is thus a concept of dress, and in particular of fashionable dress, as a sort of “second lived body (*zweiter Leib*)” (Fink 1969, 69) for such particular “second-nature animals” as the human beings that, following again John McDowell (and a long tradition of philosophical-anthropological theories that his insights rely on), are not merely embedded in a natural environment (*Umwelt*) like all other animals but are rather characterized by the possession of a “second nature” and thus live in a historical-cultural world (*Welt*)<sup>14</sup>.

Quite interestingly, somehow analogous observations on body and dress have been made by such influencing fashion theorists as Joanne Entwistle and Malcom Barnard (without ever mentioning Fink, however). The former, in her influential study *The Fashioned Body*, also speaks of dress as a sort of extension of our embodied Self, i.e. as a sort of “second skin” (see Entwistle 2000)<sup>15</sup>. While Barnard, for his part, explicitly refers to Entwistle herself and still other theorists, and argues that fashion is “about the ‘fashioned’ body”, by which he understands “*not a natural [...] body*” but rather

a “produced” and therefore “cultured” body. This is partly because one of the meanings of fashion (as a verb) is “to make” or “to produce”, and partly because *there can be no simple, uncultured, natural body*. [...] Even when naked, the body is posed or held in certain ways, it makes gestures and it is thoroughly meaningful. To say that the fashioned body is always *a cultured body* is also to say that the fashioned body is *a meaningful body* [...]. This is because saying that fashion is meaningful is to say that *fashion is a cultural phenomenon* (Barnard 2007, 4; my emphasis).

In this context, returning to Fink, a decisive element in his conception is represented by the human capacity to assume a distanced position from natural impulses (especially those

concerning natural attraction and seduction), to learn how to manage and control them, to establish a mediated relationship with them rather than immediately attempting to satisfy them, and finally to sublimate such impulses by means of cultural activities. It is precisely at this point that fashion comes into play, inasmuch as the latter is understood by Fink as a seductive game, as a “sphere-in-between” or a “field-in-between”: namely, as a space that is the result of a typically human process of sublimation of impulses but does not function as a means for the latter’s mere repression or suppression, but rather leads to their intensification and even exaggeration, although always in the context of culturally domesticated activities.

From this point of view, fashion’s relation to natural impulses and seduction is not immediate and one-sided, but rather complex and also ambiguous, as if fashion played with them and at the same time was played by them, in an inextricable intertwinement of activity and passivity<sup>16</sup>. In more general terms, in Fink’s perspective fashion seems to share with human existence as such a fundamental ambiguity<sup>17</sup>: or better, fashion embodies the ambiguous character that is typical of the human being as both a natural and a cultural being, it takes this ambiguity on, and it actually brings it to extremes. For Fink, “the phenomenon of fashion is connected to change, instability, fleetingness” (Fink 1969, 32), and this may be understood as a reflection, as it were, of the unstable, uncertain, always transient character of human nature as such (see, in particular, Fink 1969, 111-113).

## 5.

It is clear that making fashion’s essentially ambiguous and multiform character fully explicit implies a refusal to adopt a simplifying or reductionist approach to this phenomenon, and thus leads one to ask the question as to whether or not there is a particular aspect or dimension of fashion that may be taken as a privileged key to gain an adequate access to it. Fink’s answer to this question is that such a privileged key is represented by the aesthetic dimension: that is, should one want to assign fashion to a particular domain within the broad

and complex realm of various philosophical disciplines (ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, politics, metaphysics, etc.), it would be definitely aesthetics.

Quite interestingly, this is also something that several fashion theorists have paid great attention to. To quote again Elizabeth Wilson, what is required in order to adequately account for fashion is “an explanation in aesthetic terms”: for Wilson, fashion is “a branch of aesthetics”, it is “one among many forms of aesthetic creativity which make possible the exploration of alternatives”, in short it is “a serious aesthetic medium” (Wilson 2003, 116, 245, 268). Indeed, one of the main reasons why fashion greatly conditions our lives and even contributes to the definition of the *Zeitgeist* of the present age, probably lies in its aesthetic potentialities. For example, it lies in the capacity of fashion to express, through aesthetic means, symbolic contents that come to play a relevant role in the definition of both our individual and collective identities. As further observed by Wilson, fashion represents “an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society”: for her, “everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles”, and she adds that in various cases the theorists’ attempts to reduce fashion to psychology or sociology have led us to exclude, “or at best minimise, the vital aesthetic element of fashion” (Wilson 2003, 3, 9).

In Fink’s essay *Mode: ein verführerisches Spiel* the idea of a “peculiar aesthetic function of fashion” (Fink 1969, 70) emerges, for example, in connection to the question of leadership or command in fashion. A question, the latter, that Fink proposes to solve, as it were, by introducing the concept of seduction as quintessential to understand what fashion really is and how it functions (see Fink 1969, 96-101). In fact, for Fink fashion’s influence on us, its capacity to determine our taste and preferences, often extending its conditioning power to our lifestyle and our decisions in other dimensions of our life, does not derive from some kind of command or authoritative coercion. Rather, it is the result of fashion’s persuasive power deriving from its incomparable ability to play with seduction, with the human being’s fundamental need to fascinate and at

the same time be fascinated or seduced. This persuasion and seduction power is precisely exercised by fashion with aesthetic means, i.e. thanks to its capacity to play in always new ways with forms and contents, materials and colors, in order to produce original works that may fascinate us and may be aesthetically appreciated and enjoyed by us. On this basis, Fink strategically makes use of such important concepts of aesthetics as *Schein*, *Verklärung*, *Phantasie* or *Illusion*, and eventually draws the conclusion that fashion's essential way of being, i.e. what it really *is*, is precisely "a seductive play" and "a seductive appearance" (Fink 1969, 101).

## 6.

It is quite intriguing to see how many of the questions and aspects that have emerged from Fink's phenomenological treatment of the body/dress relation and the idea of clothes as a sort of "second skin" for the "second-nature animals" that we are, can be fruitfully compared to some recent somaesthetic observations on body, dress and fashion from the pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman. As already observed before, the concept of "soma" introduced precisely by somaesthetics refers to "the living, sentient, purposive human body" and is aimed to embrace "both the mental and the physical", and also both the natural and the cultural in their complex mutual intertwinement, thus including "both sides of the German phenomenological distinction between *Leib* [...] and *Körper*": as Shusterman explains, "the soma reveals that human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture" (Shusterman 2019, 14-15). Now, it is clear that the cultural nature (so to speak) of the human body's relation to the world does not depend only on the fact that, as Elizabeth Wilson claims, "in all societies the body is 'dressed', and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles" (Wilson 2003, 2). However, it is also clear that clothing, inasmuch as it is such a universal and thus fundamental-anthropological phenomenon, plays a great role in this process. This evidently makes it an interesting object for inquiry for such a philosophical discipline as somaesthetics, with its aim to favor

[a] critical study and meliorative cultivation of the experience and use of the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-stylization. An ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice, somaesthetics seeks to enrich not only our discursive knowledge of the body but also our lived somatic experience and performance; it aims to improve the meaning, understanding, efficacy, and beauty of our movements and of the environments to which our actions contribute and from which they also derive their energies and significance. To pursue these aims, somaesthetics is concerned with a wide diversity of knowledge forms, discourses, social practices and institutions, cultural traditions and values, and bodily disciplines that structure (or could improve) such somatic understanding and cultivation” and its internal division in branches (Shusterman 2016, 101).

From the point of view of somaesthetics – which is “an interdisciplinary project, in which theory and practice are closely connected and reciprocally nourish each other” (Shusterman 2016, 101) – clothing and fashion especially appear as interesting objects of inquiry because of their essentially ambiguous character. This can be clearly and explicitly connected to some of Fink’s abovementioned observations on the same topic. In fact, if the human body’s intrinsic dialectic of *Leibsein* and *Körperhaben* “expresses the ambiguity of human being” (Shusterman 2008, 1), in an analogous way also “the notion of fashion embraces considerable ambiguity” (Shusterman 2016, 95). Fashion – understood by Shusterman as “a complex, paradoxical enterprise of trying to reconcile contrasting elements into a compelling fit”, and as “a complex process of fitting a striking variety of conflicting forces together in a productive and dynamic balance” – is surely “a social and cultural product” (Shusterman 2016, 92, 95, 98). At the same time, however, especially because of its relation to the fundamental human phenomenon of clothing, fashion “appears to derive from the deeper physiological and psychological essence of human nature”, i.e. it is “‘by nature’ artificial” (Shusterman 2016, 98) like the human being. This, once again, clearly reminds us of some of the abovementioned observations on fashion offered by Fink from a phenomenological perspective that can be fruitfully compared to Shusterman’s recent somaesthetic developments of this topic. According to him,

fashion paradoxically reveals the body it conceals precisely by concealing it. [...] Though clothing is not strictly speaking part of one's body in the way that a tattoo belongs to it, our bodies shape our clothes in ways that they do not shape more external fashion accessories. [...] [O]ur clothes shape our bodies. [...] We need also to consider the ways our clothing shapes our somatic habits, because the purposive body is not simply a bundle of bones and flesh but a complex of postural and behavioral dispositions that guide our actions without our needing to think about them explicitly. [...] [C]lothes also have a social meaning as they are associated with certain attitudes that wearers of those clothes spontaneously adopt through prior experience in wearing those clothes. [...] As clothes are made to fit the bodies and movements of men and women, so the bodily behavior of those men and women are conversely made (through training or implicit learning) to fit the meanings of those clothes (Shusterman 2016, 98-99).

As Shusterman claims, “a vast and complex array of pragmatic disciplines has been designed to improve our experience and use of our bodies”, and this includes “forms of grooming and decoration, martial and erotic arts, yoga, massage, aerobics, bodybuilding, calisthenics, and modern psychosomatic disciplines” (Shusterman 2016, 102), and also clothing and fashion. If it is true that “our bodies are visible social markers of our values, affiliations, and tastes”, then we can say that it is also through the particular kind of “somatic self-stylization” (Shusterman 2016, 103) provided by fashion (in its being an unceasing play with forms, colors and seductive appearances) that individuals, in the present age of widespread aestheticization, have the chance to develop their unique “somatic styles” (Shusterman 2011). Returning once more to the question of play, our goal should thus be that of becoming acquainted with fashion, of freely, actively and even joyfully playing with it (instead than being passively played by it, i.e. conditioned and even determined by its often incomprehensible and unbearable caprices), of autonomously developing our own “somatic style”, and of individually finding the right connection between our own *Leib* and the “second lived body” that, as we have seen, is dress.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a reconstruction and interpretation of current debates on aestheticization (sometimes also viewed as the aesthetic counterpart of globalization), see for instance: Michaud 2003, Lipovetsky and Serroy 2013, Di Stefano 2017, Matteucci 2017, Mecacci 2017, Iannilli 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Recent and relevant *philosophical* works on fashion include, for example, for instance, the books and collections by Scapp and Seitz 2010; Wolfendale and Kennett 2011; Matteucci and Marino 2016; Pappas 2016b.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent reconstruction and interpretation, that also takes into examination earlier literary and essayistic studies on fashion before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, can be found in Esposito (2004, especially 7-16, 34-42, 65-73).

<sup>4</sup> On this topic, let me remind the reader of Marino 2016.

<sup>5</sup> I freely adapt here to my purposes the important concept of “second nature” employed by John McDowell in his famous epistemological work *Mind and World* (1996), which can be also connected to a long and influential tradition of phenomenological, hermeneutical and philosophical-anthropological reflections on human nature in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century German thought (on this topic, see Marino 2015, chapter 1).

<sup>6</sup> To be precise, Shusterman refers here to Merleau-Ponty that he also emphatically defines in subsequent writings as “something like the patron saint of the body [...] in the field of Western philosophy” (Shusterman 2008, 49).

<sup>7</sup> According to Simona Bertolini, “the notion of *world* is the key concept of Fink’s entire post-war philosophical work. [...] The concept of *world-totality* is the veritable barycentre of Fink’s philosophy” (Bertolini 2012, 128, 242). In turn, for Bertolini, Fink’s idea of “cosmological difference”, clearly deriving from the concept of *kosmos* (expressed in German with such words as *Welt*, *Weltgantheit*, *Weltsein*), reminds of Heidegger’s famous idea of the “ontological difference” between Being and beings but does not fully correspond to it.

<sup>8</sup> On this topic, see for example Carnevali 2020.

<sup>9</sup> “The human being – as a player – is close to fashion and all its phenomenical forms” (Fink 1969, 40).

<sup>10</sup> See also the insights and explanations on this aspect provided at pages 22-23, 53, 64 of Fink’s book.

<sup>11</sup> On the general significance of sociability for human life, in general, and its connection to the domain of play, in particular, see Fink 1969, 79-81, 85-86, 88, 93.

<sup>12</sup> For Fink, “the human body always already shows, reveals [...] and permeates at the same time clothing with its tendency to communication. [...] Fashion is a phenomenon that is essentially connected [...] to the human being’s embodied nature, to our existence’s being-incarnated” (Fink 1969, 50, 77).

<sup>13</sup> On this aspect, see Fink 1969, 51-53, 69, 71.

<sup>14</sup> On this topic, let me remind the reader of Marino 2017.

<sup>15</sup> It is probably not by chance that Entwistle’s original account relies, among others, also on phenomenological insights into the significance of the bodily dimension for the constitution of our experience of the world in general.

<sup>16</sup> More in general, the complexity and, as it were, the eminently dialectical character of Fink’s conception of fashion (using here the concepts of “dialectics” and “dialectical” with a broad and quite general meaning) emerges

in the perhaps clearest way when Fink introduces the idea of an intrinsic relation between opposite moments, antagonisms and contrasts as relevant and indeed decisive for the definition of fashion: for example, struggle for eternity vs. transience, naturalness vs. artificialness, imitation vs. distinction, conformism vs. originality, assimilation to others vs. individualism, public life vs. private life, dressing vs. undressing (see Fink 1969, 33, 45-46, 62, 69-70, 105). On a terminological level, this aspect especially emerges in the use of such concepts as *Gegenwirkung*, *Gegenwendigkeit* or *Gegensatzmotiv* (see Fink 1969, 30, 53, 96-97).

<sup>17</sup> “Dress has an ambivalent, equivocal and plurivalent expressive value” (Fink 1969, 36). Fashionable dress is characterized by its “ambivalence, its ambiguity and its intrinsic oppositive character” (Fink 1969, 55). “Fashion has many faces, its smiling gracefulness is more enigmatic than the smile of the Gioconda” (Fink 1969, 77).

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**Stefano Marino** is Associate Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Bologna. His main research interests are focused on critical theory, hermeneutics, neopragmatism, philosophy of music and aesthetics of fashion. He is the author of several monographs, among which: *Le verità del non-vero. Tre studi su Adorno, teoria critica ed estetica* (2019), *Aesthetics, Metaphysics, Language: Essays on Heidegger and Gadamer* (2015), *La filosofia di Frank Zappa. Un'interpretazione adorniana* (2014), *Gadamer and the Limits of the Modern Techno-scientific Civilization* (2011). He has translated from German into Italian, or from English into Italian, the following books: Th. W. Adorno, *Variazioni sul jazz. Critica della musica come merce* (2018), C. Korsmeyer, *Il senso del gusto. Cibo e filosofia* (2015), H.-G. Gadamer, *Ermeneutica, etica, filosofia della storia* (2014), H.-G. Gadamer, *Che cos'è la verità* (2012). He has published several collections (as books or special issues in journals) as co-editor, among which: *Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in the Twentieth Century: A Companion to Its Main Interpretations* (2020: forthcoming), *Be Cool! Aesthetic Imperatives and Social Practices* (2020), *Adorno and Popular Music: A Constellation of Perspectives* (2019), *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion* (2016), *Theodor W. Adorno: Truth and Dialectical Experience* (2016).

**Address:**

Stefano Marino  
University of Bologna  
Associate Professor of Aesthetics  
via Zamboni 38, Bologna, Italy  
Tel.: +39 051 20 9 8412  
<http://www.unibo.it/docenti/stefano.marino4>  
E-mail: [stefano.marino4@unibo.it](mailto:stefano.marino4@unibo.it)