

CHAPTER TWELVE

PROTEAN IMAGES OF FASHION: REVALUATION OF PAST STYLES IN NEW SETTINGS

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Emerging within western society during its transition from the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance, fashion has been defined by its ever-changing character, which eventually enabled this phenomenon to distinguish itself as one of the most prominent mechanisms of contemporary society. Driven by its dedication towards novelty, the fashion system continued to flourish along the lines of historical progress, with new styles cyclically arising from the upper classes and subsequently trickling down towards the lower. In the beginning of the twentieth century, these processes were described by Georg Simmel as the consequences of psychological tendencies towards imitation and social equalization on the one hand, and the need for differentiation and variation on the other (Simmel, 1999: 226). Along with this definition of fashion as an expression of class division, Simmel established a link between the essence of fashion and its question of “simultaneously being and non-being”. Once certain fashion styles were adopted by those of high social standing as a form of novelty and consequently appropriated by the less well off, while being at their fashionable peak, these new ideas established a dividing line between the past and the future, thus channelling for a moment, according to Simmel, more than any other phenomenon, a very strong sense of the present (Simmel, 1999: 232).

Whereas fashion, over its centuries-long course, has undoubtedly been marked by constant reinvention, it is this notion and connection to a certain time frame, understood as the present, that should be addressed before making attempts to analyse the relays between fashion’s contemporary and historical manifestations. Even though Simmel’s understanding of fashion was profoundly rooted in his study on the impact of modernity upon early

twentieth-century social life and consumption, the link between fashion and the present continued to remain a point of interest, often revised by postmodernist authors such as Gilles Lipovetsky. In the introductory chapter of his book *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, which represents an analysis of fashion's transformation and the conceptualization of its rising power within the notion of "open society" of the twentieth century, Lipovetsky not only made an attempt to describe fashion as a "frenzied modern passion for novelty", but additionally noted its importance as a "celebration of the social present" (Lipovetsky, 2002: 4). On a similar note, fashionable clothing was approached by Christopher Breward as a commodity that had the ability to contribute towards "the shaping of a sense of the present for its various consumers" (Breward, 2003: 16) and Barbara Vinken, furthermore, discussed fashion as the "art of the perfect moment, of the sudden, surprising and yet obscurely expected harmonious apparition – the New at the threshold of an immediate future" (Vinken, 2005: 42).

By following fashion and its guidelines we become acquainted with garments and accessories of specific shapes, cuts and fabrics that were appreciated by consumers as desirable commodities during a particular period of time. But due to fashion's susceptibility towards perpetual innovation, this effect of new modes can only establish itself as temporary. On account of the fact that the emergence of fashion accompanied the appearance of capitalism, Roland Barthes aligned fashion with other, similar phenomena of *neomania*. Fashion's reality, as Barthes once commented in his semiotic analysis of the fashion system, represented nothing more than the arbitrariness which established it (Barthes, 1985: 300).

According to Barthes, as was the case with many other phenomena of the day, fashion had the power to covert reality into myth. While blurring and discrediting its own past, the rhetoric of fashion established control over the fashion process, as a consequence of which the present became perceived as a "new absolute". Despite this profound relationship between "in" and "now", the role of history within the fashion system has always been accompanied by its ability to resurrect past forms. Fashion's seemingly forward-looking and progressive character allowed this phenomenon to play with styles of bygone eras rather than casting them off as outdated forms excluded from the speculative optimism of today. In order to find examples of such historical turns, it is sufficient to recall the "passion for things Antique" and high-waisted muslin dresses popular after the French Revolution, or even the later neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance styles adopted by the rich middle classes during the first half of the nineteenth century (Boucher, 1967: 337–355; Dorfles, 1997: 71).

Challenges to the linear nature of historical progress continued to flourish in the modern, postmodern and contemporary fashion eras with their ever-quickenning rhythm of metamorphosis and an increasingly democratized system of fashion. This allowed certain styles to become reinstalled after rather short periods of time, which raised questions regarding the applicability of the acclaimed Laver's Law that was postulated in 1937 as a chart with which the costume historian James Laver made an attempt to describe the dynamics of taste and establish a relationship between trends and continuous cycles of nostalgia. Based on his observation of fashion history, Laver suggested that the same costume could be perceived as indecent ten years before its time, shameless five years before its time, daring one year before its time, smart while being fashionable, dowdy one year after its time, hideous ten years after its time, ridiculous twenty years after its time, amusing thirty years after its time, quaint fifty years after its time, charming seventy years after its time, romantic one hundred years after its time and beautiful one hundred and fifty years after its time (Lurie, 1983: 7).

Although Laver's chart seems applicable to modernity's appreciation of past aesthetics, recent vogues for 1990s fashions raise questions regarding its relevance when it comes to contemporary trend mechanisms. Based on styles that were considered popular only two decades ago, current designer reinterpretations of 1990s fashions or even original vintage items dating from the decade in question seem to be perceived by contemporary fashion diffusion agents and consumers as anything but "ridiculous". Whereas Laver's forecasts regarding the impossibility of reviving the fashions of the mid-twenties prior to the expiry of a thirty year period were able to come true during the course of the twentieth century, the same cannot be claimed for present-day consumer expectations. It becomes obvious, therefore, that the above mentioned intervals of time can no longer be applied to existing circumstances. In addition, such points of view lead us to the conclusion that the concept of temporal gaps, which were previously considered a key element in the functioning of trend mechanisms, has accordingly been challenged in its own right (Mackinney-Valentin, 2010: 12).

Following the impact of technological advancements, consumerism, mass communication and other phenomena accountable for inflicting changes within the structure of postmodern societies, fashion gained such an importance that it became, as Lipovetsky pointed out, a dominant feature. Along with its logic of ephemerality, fashion managed to restructure society from top to bottom, leaving the sphere of peripheral, aesthetic and irrational behind (Lipovetsky, 2002: 6). The question of fashionability

required a redefinition, as former standards were no longer considered mandatory in a world in which styles were simultaneously coming in and going out of fashion. Fred Davis defined fashion cycles as periods of time initiated by the introduction of a particular style and terminated by the advent of the following (Davis, 1994: 102). This cyclical pattern was indeed deeply rooted within the logic of fashion and maintained a steady pace throughout the majority of its history, but started gaining speed as a consequence of the overall development that followed the dawn of the nineteenth century. According to Davis, this acceleration was accompanied by the appearance of independent couturiers accountable for dressing a newly established market of upper–middle–class customers. New fashions ceased to be the unique privileges of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, as had been the case during previous centuries, and following further democratization, not only of society itself, but of the fashion system as well, fresh designs started appearing in a significantly faster rhythm.

This rapid flux of innovations culminated during the second half of the twentieth century. By that time, haute couture had already established its status as a central point of the fashion system, and fashion became institutionalized, orchestrated and frantically focused on the obligatory introduction of new trends (Lipovetsky, 2002: 58). And as the speed of fashion cycles accelerated, opposing fashionable concepts were no longer divided by decades,¹ but by biennial changes, mostly oriented towards new generations of post–war youth. Ted Polhemus indicated that, whereas 1960s and 1970s fashions, although significantly boosted by the advent of street cultures, managed to preserve their influence upon the dress styles of the majority of the western population, the 1980s succeeded in opening the door to a plurality of clothing trends that opposed the previously dictated universality of fashion (Polhemus, 1994: 25). At this point, fashion entered a new stage of its historical development, a phase that was notably marked by its “open” configuration (Lipovetsky, 2002: 119). By defying the need for aesthetic conformity, this new stage appeared detached from obligatory standards of dress and liberated consumers from the pressure to follow the latest fads in order not only to present themselves as individuals who kept up–to–date with fashion, but also to maintain the appearance of being socially acceptable (Laver, 2012: 291).

¹ In the eyes of Barthes, a historically stable rhythm of fashion changes was superseded by seasonal variations that eventually became apparent over much shorter periods of time. A consequence of this alteration, which could be called a “micro–diachrony”, manifested itself as an intensification of fashion’s variability through the appearance of its annual character and was, according to the author, encouraged by accelerators of an economic nature (Barthes, 1985: 297).

Contrary to its preceding formations, the 1980s fashion system became significantly determined by the “anything goes” paradigm. Its newly encountered fragmentation and flexibility was characterized by certain shifts that affected one of fashion’s seemingly constitutional characteristics – its fascination with The New (Polhemus, 1996: 9). As fashion approached its contemporary stage, the span of fashion cycles, with their beginnings, middles and ends, became significantly shorter and shorter, thus enabling the repetition of past themes more than ever before. It seemed that, even though certain stylistic similarities with earlier periods can be traced throughout fashion’s history, once visual materials from bygone eras became widely available due to the advent of technology and various means of mass media, the fashion system was at once imprinted by an unmistakable presence of historical quotation. As fashion developed into the ultimate form of bricolage that left us without any specifically discernable trends related to any particular season, Evans noticed that a great number of leading designers had started resembling magpies, or even nineteenth-century ragpickers, who plundered historical imagery in order to resurrect past forms with the aim of reviving them within their upcoming collections (Evans, 2007: 12–13). Moreover, apart from drawing inspiration from past eras in the sense of Martin Margiela’s 2006 reinvention of a 1970s shirt pattern, some designers gained great success by re–releasing their cult classics of previous decades. Diane von Furstenberg’s wrap dress is an example mentioned quite often within literature dealing with this topic. As a symbol of a decade marked by women’s liberation, the wrap dress was an iconic design that experienced a prosperous breakthrough on the fashion scene in 1973, only to triumph once again more than twenty years later in 1997, during a decade that was marked by an increased interest in vintage clothing.

In the analysis entitled *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*, Evans employed Walter Benjamin’s thoughts as interpretative tools in order to make attempts to explain retrospective tendencies within contemporary fashion. In addition, similar interpretations of Benjamin’s theses related to fashion had already been postulated by Ulrich Lehmann in his work *Tigersprung: Fashioning History*. Lehmann used Benjamin’s metaphors with the purpose of supporting arguments that distinguished fashion as a cultural phenomenon which had the ability to alter our perception of history (Lehman, 1999: 297). Ideas conceptualized by Benjamin in the late 1930s seemed particularly useful to both authors, mostly due to philosopher’s focus on modernity and his interpretation of history based upon metaphors of dialectical images and labyrinthine turns. By comparing the relationship between past and present images with cine-

matic montage techniques, Benjamin argued that a juxtaposition of past and present could create a third image with a new meaning. This new dialectical image had the ability to transform both images and make itself comprehensible in the present as a truth that is “fleeting and temporal, existing only at the moment of perception, characterized by ‘shock’ or vivid recognition” (Evans, 2007: 33). According to Lehmann, this approach allowed us to think of historical time not solely as linear, but as something with many different turns through which the past can be reactivated by injecting the present into it (Lehmann, 1999: 298). Benjamin described history as an “object of a construction whose site is not constituted by a homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit]” (Benjamin, 1969: 261). He established a link between social revolutions and fashion by perceiving the invocations of former eras and the revolutionary quotes of earlier times as similar to the way in which fashion seemed to be evoking the costumes of the past. According to Benjamin, fashion is understood as a sartorial commodity that has “a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago” (Benjamin, 1969: 261). Acting as a dialectical image of a tiger’s leap into the past, fashion hence fulfils its ability to move back and forth from modern to forgotten without establishing an exclusive relationship with the social or aesthetic values of a particular era. This enables styles stemming from periods of time separated throughout linear history to become reconnected once again while fashion realizes its potential to act not only transitorily, but also as trans-historically (Lehmann, 1999: 305).

Although the analysis presented by Evans focused primarily on historicism in the work of 1990s fashion designers, it might seem restrictive to correlate recent borrowings from past times exclusively to the sphere of contemporary fashion design. As suggested by Yuniya Kawamura, fashion should be discussed not as a phenomenon created only by a particular group of individuals, but as a “collective activity”. Kawamura’s sociological approach, entitled *fashion-ology*,² aimed to expand the understanding

² Kawamura mentions that her approach to fashion was partially based on the studies of Roland Barthes. As Kawamura remarks: “Barthes’ semiotic analysis makes us aware of the clothing system and helps us develop the concept of an institutionalized system with the concept of and the practice of fashion” (Kawamura, 2005: 39). In addition, she speaks about her references to Davis’ understanding of the fashion system, even though it should be noted that his formulation of the term varies from that of Barthes in the sense that Davis does not employ the model of the fashion system as a way to comprehend various semiotic signs that arise from the combination and usage of different garments, but rather refers to roles of the multiple institutions that take part in different interwoven processes ranging from production to consumption, such as design, display, manufacture, distribution,

of fashion by encompassing an institutionalized system that was not created as a result of the work of designers alone, but rather developed through various activities of multiple institutions, organizations and individuals participating in the production of fashionable items of dress and the diffusion of fashion (Kawamura, 2005: 43). This postulation implied that fashion did not arise from one central origin, but was built from various sources that were equally involved in the development of trends. In order to fully encompass the various aspects of revivalism, it would, therefore, seem only logical to base further evaluations of current reinterpretations of historical styles on a broader understanding of fashion, defined as a system of separate but nevertheless interacting institutions, an approach that could not only allow the analysis of this subject to aim beyond the realm of leading fashion designers, but also make it possible to appropriate the different materializations of the retro trend.

The term “retro” (Latin: back, backwards) entered widespread use in the early 1970s³ and it was during this decade that the word managed to establish its current connotations of revivalism and resurrections of the past. Stemming from the 1960s space-age lexicon and retrograde rockets, the term was initially adopted in order to “suggest a powerful counter to forward propulsion” (Guffey, 2006: 12). During the course of time, the expression developed other associations and was further linked to the late 1960s revival of interest in Art Nouveau styles, which were at the time echoing primarily throughout the field of graphic design. However, retro should not be mistaken as a term applicable to a wide range of historical quotations. According to Guffey, unlike the historicism of the nineteenth century, the retro phenomenon aims to focus on the recent past as opposed to finding inspiration in remote historical eras. It might be even more appropriate to argue that retro aspires to come to terms with the ideas of modernity, its boundaries and mortality, while at the same time trying to cover as many spheres of popular consumption as possible (Guffey, 2006: 14).

In her study dedicated to trends and trend mechanisms, Maria Mackinney-Valentin employs the term “retro trend” to discuss contemporary fashion revivals. Her arguments introduce a perspective that offers a fuller insight into the term “trend” and a deeper understanding of various forms of reinterpretation of earlier fashions in present-day fusions of old and new. When discussing the cultural and economic presence of revivalism, Mackinney-Valentin makes an attempt to distinguish three different but

sales and others (Davis, 1994: 200).

³ Jenß establishes a link between the term “retro” and the “nostalgia-wave” of the 1970s, which was accompanied by the popularization of second-hand clothing (Jenß, 2005: 179).

potentially overlapping categories (Mackinney–Valentin, 2010: 108).⁴ In accordance with her classifications of material, immaterial and literal revival,⁵ the aforementioned reinterpretation of historical turns, as explored by Evans, represents but a fragment of the overall reconnection with by-gone times and can be understood only as a single aspect of the retro trend.

Relying on Benjamin’s metaphors, Evans described contemporary fashion images as bearers of meanings that are able to “stretch simultaneously back to the past and forward into the future” (Evans, 2007: 12). In this way, they encompass a capacity to bring forth new meanings and occupy new spots within the existing chain of signifiers. Some similar thoughts on the retro trend were expressed by Christina Goulding in her article *Corsets, Silks Stockings and Evening Suits – Retro Shops and Retro Junkies*. Goulding pointed out that it would be wrong to take retro as nothing more than a simple form of imitation. On the contrary, retro seemed to appear as a blend of positive qualities from the past and modern ideas, which resulted in a considerably fresh mixture that managed to obscure the differences between historically authentic designs and present-day forms and act as a distinctive feature of the contemporary fashion system (Goulding, 2003: 55). While analyzing the retro phenomenon through recent forms of revivalism, which can be traced within a vast field of media, design, popular culture and advertising, Guffey argues that this resumption of interest in the not-so-distant past “suggests the beginning of a unique post-war tendency, a popular thirst for the recovery of earlier, and yet still modern, periods at an ever-accelerating rate” (Guffey, 2006: 8). She describes retro as a cardinal shift in the popular understanding of the historical, a newly established relationship between past, present and future in which the word retro “implicitly invokes what is yet to come, as well as what had passed” (Guffey, 2006: 28).

This alteration of the communal perception of history was addressed by Jean Baudrillard in his analysis of historical references in postmodern

⁴ On a similar note, Jenß also postulates that retro “cannot clearly be restricted to reproduction or original” (Jenß, 2005: 179).

⁵ Mackinney–Valentin describes the categories present within the Retro Trend as follows:

1. Material revival – the “category concerned with the physical, material revival of an item that has been excluded from the fashion system at some point, and which has often been previously worn”.
2. Immaterial revival – the “category concerned with how the fashion system incorporates the Immaterial expression of the Retro Trend”.
3. Literal revival – the “category concerned with the literal revival of the past trend in the sense of a direct copy of past fashion items” (Mackinney–Valentin, 2010: 108).

1970s cinema. Baudrillard argued that history had already retreated, leaving behind a vagueness empty of references, a void that could be filled solely with phantasms of the past, such as retro fashions themselves. These substitutions did not occur because of any hopes for the potential rebirth of past eras, but with the aim “to resurrect a period when at least there was history”. According to the philosopher, the past had become demythologized and just about anything could serve to escape the condition that he referred to as a “void” and a “hemorrhage of values”. The postmodern perception of retro hence approached various phenomena ambiguously simply because of the fact that the present-day era was marked by the absence of a dominant idea that would allow all previous history to become resurrected “in bulk” (Baudrillard, 2000: 44).

In a stage in which fashion came to light, freed from the influence of major haute couture houses (Lipovetsky, 2002: 119), other re-performances of the past start appearing as trans-historical elements within the broad sphere of the fashion system. Items that were once considered fashionable, but that had found themselves substituted with fresh styles, represent only a fragment of a vast body of second-hand clothing (Tranberg Hansen, 2006: 232; Calefato, 2004: 127). The trade in used garments developed a long history during which disposed-of clothes were widely considered to be affordable alternatives in times of poverty and scarcity. These social and economic purposes eventually linked recycled garments to connotations of lower social status, and traces of former owners meant pre-worn clothes were perceived as unhygienic or even associated with disease and death (Jenß, 2005: 184; Palmer and Clark, 2005: 3). While trying to examine the nature of the second lives of used garments, Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark pointed out that many cultural taboos surrounding used clothing started to blur out with the turn of the new millennium (Palmer and Clark, 2005: 4). At that point, the transformation of the fashion system that accompanied the advent of postmodernity had already welcomed more widespread claims for distinction and the emergence of fashion as a form of bricolage made it possible for the system to encompass long abandoned trends.

Since the 1960s, along with the advent of countercultural street styles, original items of dress stemming from previous eras started regaining popularity as reflections of anti-consumerist tendencies, the search for individuality and forms of romantic reinterpretation of the past. These tendencies, mostly present among 1960s American and British youth, encouraged the resurrection of both ethnic and antique romanticized materials such as furs, lace, velvet and crepe (Goulding, 2003: 57). While evoking a radical “granny” look, these garments managed to succeed in expres-

sing scorn and rejection of contemporary trends (Lurie, 1983: 82), hence throwing down challenges to the existing hierarchical structure of fashion. Changes in the second-hand market continued to take place as bohemian morality remained present during the upcoming decades. This enabled re-used clothes to enter new cycles, extend their life expectancies as commodities and prolong their biographies (Kopytoff, 1986: 67) through unexpected transformations of their cultural and economic values (Gregson and Crewe, 2003: 146). The term “vintage” became distinguished from the general notion of second-hand clothing by serving as a means of Mackinney–Valentin’s manifestation of material revival, thus allowing used clothing to become reinterpreted in a new context, which was now accompanied by a fluctuation of signifiers and associated meanings.

Yet as much as young people develop fondness for former styles in order to express their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from those whom they perceive as victims of mass imposed fashion, interests in forgotten trends have often been related to nostalgic tendencies (Goulding, 2003: 56; Davis, 1994: 130), which on their own might transform themselves into, as Anja Aronowsky Cronberg observed in the article *Postmodernism and Fashion in the Late Twentieth Century – Imagined Nostalgia and False Memories*, “an epidemic of the modern age” (Aronowsky Cronberg, 2010: 167). In her book entitled *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym referred to nostalgia not only as a malady of the individual, but as a symptom of our age, “a historical emotion” (Boym, 2001: xv). Boym approached this collective nostalgia as a form of defiance that appeared against the current perception of time, understood as the time of history and progress. In an age marked by “accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals”, feelings of nostalgia arose as a consequence of a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. The irreversibility of time, therefore, was opposed by the transformation of history into a collective mythologized age that could be revisited in geographical terms.

As postulated by Davis, nostalgic revival is more likely to take hold of eras which are classified within the collective memory as pleasant. Such recollections might explain why 1920s and 1960s styles have experienced as many reincarnations as they did after their initial appearance (Davis, 1994: 130). In her ethnographic research dedicated to the contemporary German 1960s scene, Heike Jenß examined the passion that encouraged retro scene members to resurrect objects and motifs retrospectively associated with their lifestyles and the desired look of the past.⁶ In order to

⁶ These 1960s German enthusiasts should not be misunderstood as a unique phenomenon oriented towards the historically accurate resurrection of former decades/streetstyles. Ever since the mid-1980s, there has been a wide range of retro-

achieve authentic retro appearances these individuals collected original items of dress which they perceived as valuable witnesses of bygone stylistic eras. Although Jenß argued that this particular choice of dress opened up “an imaginary time travel, technically realized through the interconnection of dress and space” (Jenß, 2004: 390), she also pointed out that it would be rather superficial to interpret such interests in 1960s clothing as symptoms of nostalgia that would result from the inability of retro consumers to cope with present conditions (Jenß, 2005: 194). Moreover, Jenß emphasized that vintage clothing allowed 1960s scene members to create new identities and establish themselves as collectors and connoisseurs who accumulated specialist knowledge about their favourite historical period, a knowledge that was further utilized in order to establish their retro-performances and distinguish them from the inauthenticity of other vintage wearers, representing in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu an important component of their (sub)cultural capital (Jenß, 2005: 182).

According to Palmer and Clark, fashionable reinterpretations of second-hand clothing are approaching the status of commodified mainstream phenomena and vintage garments are being transformed into highly desirable fashionable styles that are gaining popularity among contemporary consumers. Along with retro aficionados, as described by Jenß, who constantly strive for perfect historical accuracy within their lifestyle of choice, retro garments are becoming increasingly sought after by high street fashion consumers. Palmer and Clark pointed out that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the rise in the popularity of vintage clothing started shifting from the sphere of subcultural practices towards the sphere of mainstream fashion wearers (Palmer and Clark, 2005: 174). Lacking any kind of relationship with the historical past or specific interest in particular bygone eras, mainstream consumers delve into vintage styles in order to become perceived as fashionable and stylish without raising questions regarding potential nostalgic references and desires to revisit a romanticized past. Vintage fashions are worn in different environments, ranging from college campuses to red carpet events, and are often mixed together with currently fashionable forms of dress and adornment. Dressing in these fusions of old and new clothing in various settings opens the way, according to Calefato, to multiple discourses (Calefato, 2004: 127).

Such forms of eclecticism should not come as a surprise. Fredric Jameson had already established a relationship between the above mentioned postmodern deterioration of historicity and an understanding of contempo-

groups dedicated to the reinvention of the spirit of specific post-war youth cultures such as: Neo-Mods, Neo-Teds, Neo-Hippies, Neo-Psychedelics, Neo-Punks and even Neo-New Romantics (Polhemus, 1996: 130).

rary culture as irredeemably historicist; in other words, as one that is marked by an “omnipresent and indiscriminate appetite for dead styles and fashions; indeed for all the styles and fashions of a dead past” (Jameson, 1997: 285). He presented these thoughts by giving examples of architectural historicism while trying to refer to various works marked by the presence of random cannibalization of earlier styles that merely resulted in an equally random “play of stylistic allusions” and “overstimulating ensembles”. According to Jameson, nostalgia was not an appropriate term to describe these forms of historical fascination. Whether it came to architecture or the genre of “nostalgia film”, the efforts made by the postmodern present to catch up with its past remained solely reflected through “stylistic connotations, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s–ness’ or ‘1950s–ness’ by the attributes of fashion” (Jameson, 1997: 18).

Even though certain aspects of revival have the ability to disclose connotations of self–performance and express the preservation of certain eras through material dress forms, the individuality of the mainstream retro wearer remains questionable in an age when vintage clothing has become widely perceived as fashionable and desirable. Similar questions can be raised when referring to the ragpicking designers discussed by Evans or even those who decide to rerelease their former collections in order to participate in the current retro trend. According to Polhemus, we are all “retros” today (Polhemus, 1994: 78): the subcultural retro groups that indulge in time travel in their attempts to annihilate the present as well as the girl next door who simply follows another trendy stereotype when rummaging through thrift stores in order to emulate the latest style of an idolized celebrity. While the behavioral patterns which encourage these “consumer bricoleurs” to indulge in mixes of old and new fashions could be perceived as links between looking backwards and looking forwards (Aronowsky Cronberg, 2010: 186), it should be recalled that contemporary fashion mechanisms function along significantly different lines than their preceding modern and postmodern editions.

As a system marked by chaotically auto–referential signs, contemporary fashion has managed to transform itself during the past two decades into what Paić terms the “visual semiotics of the body”. The last remaining site of postmodern culture, the idea of spectacle as postulated by Guy Debord has not only fully developed fashion’s ability to dominate over our lives and society, but also to “deprive fashion of its privilege of novelty and constant change” (Paić, 2007: 233). The modern as well as postmodern rules that used to govern the existence of this social phenomenon now appear too have been submerged in an understanding of the time of

fashion as “consumed in a space where it no longer makes sense to separate past and present, synchrony and diachrony” (Calefato, 2004: 123). Calefato writes that, while recreating former styles, we remain inevitably marked by the overriding signs that define us as individuals of our own time and not of the past. Although these thoughts are in line with comments expressed by Jenß, who concludes that many members of the 1960s retro scene end up emulating styles available through associations based upon visual archives of media images such as photographs, record covers, feature and documentary films, as a consequence of which the look achieved might even inadvertently distort rather than replicate the look that was at the time adopted by the majority of consumers (Jenß, 2004: 395), when it comes to semiotic profiling, it is almost inevitable that questions are raised concerning the ability of contemporary signs to function along the lines of previously established semiotic correlations.

In case the present condition can be held accountable for transforming the classical relationship between signifiers and signified and in turn leading to the above mentioned metamorphosis of fashion’s social and aesthetic codes, as postulated by Paić, revivals of past styles might no longer have the ability to convey connotations of “pastness” throughout contemporary visual culture. In short, Woody Hochswender’s thoughts on the incidence of 1960s revival⁷ lose their significance in a world where the mini skirt is not only stripped of its 1960s connotation, but also of its message of youthfulness and freedom. Such challenges to Barthes, Eco or Lurie’s variations of the “language of clothes” encourage us to consider alternative approaches along the existing interpretations of the fashion system. While alluring new interdisciplinary paradigms are stimulated by the undoubted necessity of fresh thoughts when it comes to acknowledging the importance of images and the effect they produce upon current fashions, previously postulated ideas still remain useful for making wider attempts towards the understanding of past historical turns.

It was therefore the aim of this paper to offer a brief overview of various academic evaluations of historical recurrences of former styles ranging from the era of modernity to present-day visual expressions, but also to encompass those styles that have been absorbed by corresponding fashion systems as both fashion and anti-fashion statements. Even though our

⁷ In the article *A Little Nervous Music*, published by *The New York Times* in January 1991, Hochswender expressed the following thoughts trying to predict fashion trends for the upcoming decade: “The cycles in fashion get shorter and shorter. How many times have the 60s been revived since the 60s? They’re never out long enough to be completely out. Soon all the decades will overlap dangerously. Soon everything will simultaneously be out” (Davis, 1994: 107).

frantic raid of the past continues, the rules of the game have undoubtedly been challenged and different codes seem to be governing ever-present retro-futurist tendencies. The potential developments in theoretical approaches that could underpin historical longings in the twenty-first century, as well as accommodate Davis's guidelines when it comes to introducing a balance between certain aspects of the existing fashion system model and the understanding of various contemporary swirls in the sphere of the sartorial, remain to be further established in the context of complementary societal changes.

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