



Integrity

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Identity. Few other aspects in the study of contemporary social life have gained such a long list of missionaries. Even if it is true that the concept's dominating role in cultural studies – regardless if approached from a sociological, psychological, economical or didactic perspective – has started to give way for a more nuanced discourse on social life, the notion of a symbolically constructed identity still has a widespread undermining impact when it comes to the of understanding of face, body and dress in fashion.

Thus, instead of understanding identity as e.g. a »never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged« – as Zygmunt Bauman suggests in *The Individualized Society* – the concept's other characteristics of ambiguity and dynamism has been replaced with a certain systematic finite game. Hence, instead of people's torment of today being how to grow and sustain integrity and how to have it recognized in the social body, it is which identity [symbol] to choose, and how to keep vigilant enough to another choice when the previously chosen symbol [identity] is withdrawn from the market or stripped from its seductive powers, as Bauman accurately suggests.

In fashion studies the identity discourse may be seen as one of the dominant theoretical perspectives alongside gender, class or queer theory. As such it posts somewhat of a widespread problem in the understanding of the relationship between face, body and dress. Because, what at first organically was [when conspicuous consumption gradually was noted by sociologist and economists], has not only turned into something that mechanically is [as the 'theories' found became schools of thought] but moreover into a widespread proclamation of what ought to be [as advertising – propaganda – utilised these idea]. Together, this means that the understanding of identity as a social reality in clothing and fashion based on the notion of one thing's affinity with another – I – may not be so much a possible social actuality as a cynical expressionistic canon. And apparently, this proclaimed canon have reached such a levels that when Marilyn Barton at Fashion Institute of Technology in New York kindly printed a very early version of this work, she replied spontaneously: »In your spare time you might want to consider a Lacanian analysis of overburdened housewives who choose their clothing from the laundry basket (the less stinky the better). With any luck, the wrinkles in the fabric will be perceived as an intentional affront to the current capitalist patriarchal society instead of what they really are, a reflection of a lazy housewife.«

Nevertheless, the question scrutinised here is not so much the potential exaggerations in the interpretation of representation and meaning in dress encouraged by various discourses in cultural studies. Instead, the focus is rather integrity, based on the relationship between face and dress from a concrete humanistic perspective. Is there still a face amongst all the clothes in fashion one may ask? Or perhaps better put: is a face still a face?

































































































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