Fashion as an Aesthetic Form of Life: A Wittgensteinian Interpretation

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Fashion is an aesthetic practice which concerns the ordinary sphere of our life: it is associated with everydayness and it is a source of endless aesthetic experiences. The purpose of this paper is to validate a new perspective on fashion based on Wittgenstein's later aesthetic conception. In Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion *(2017), Matteucci introduces the idea of combining the Wittgensteinian concept of "form of life" with fashion. In accordance with this thesis, the paper aims at showing how fashion is constituted as a "form of life". Specifically, I shall argue that fashion is an "aesthetics form of life" which structurally employs a language of an aesthetic type —one with a specific grammar (or set of rules) of its own. I claim that there is in fashion a contact point between the grammar of language and socially encoded aesthetic responses: fashion follows slavishly its own grammar, through its cyclical seasonality, while at the same time tending to creatively reinvent itself. Thus, anyone who daily commits to the practices of fashion acquires sensitivity to its rules, contributing to a social dialectic of identification / diversification typically belonging to fashion itself. Finally, on the basis of the claim that fashion is a "form of life", and indeed since fashion is primarily an aesthetic practice, I claim that Wittgenstein's aesthetic notions can coherently be related to fashion as well: concepts such as 'aesthetic reaction', 'gesture', and 'correctness' will be shown to be crucial to an analysis of the aesthetic phenomenon of fashion.*

Keywords: Fashion; dressing; Wittgenstein; form of life; grammar.

1. *Introduction*

Within the discipline of aesthetics, the appearance of fashion as a field of enquiry in relatively recent. The abundancy of studies related to fashion in literature, sociology, psychology, economy and anthropol-

ogy is not nearly matched by the relatively exiguous number of studies devoted to the topic in philosophical aesthetics[1]. Nevertheless, as Ian King states, fashion can afford us a new opportunity to understand contemporary aesthetics, provided that our understanding of it will be detached from "the discussion in the aesthetics literature [that has been] normally theoretical, normative and reliant predominantly on understandings taken from fine art" (King 2017: 2). A different understanding or approach to fashion should take into consideration its practical and ordinary dimension, focusing on the daily activities and everyday objects that fashion itself involves. Before trying to spell out what I take to be the first essential step toward a different understanding of fashion, I wish however to define what I mean by "fashion."

The term "fashion" is often associated with an institutionalized system made up by groups, organizations, producers, events and practices, other than being simply associated with dress or clothing (cf. Kawamura 2005: 43). However, it seems rather arbitrary to exclude *a priori* from a definition of "fashion" some of the aspects of the complex and multifarious phenomenon we call "fashion", or at any rate to marginalize them. At the same time, in the condensed space of a paper, it is impossible to deal with most of them. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I shall thus restrict the field of application of my definition of "fashion" to two aspect aspects of the phenomenon of fashion, which are meant to support my arguments in what follows. First, I take "fashion" to signify an everyday practice with which we confront daily. Specifically, I mean the ensemble of actions involved in the practice of dressing ourselves up.[2] Secondly, I take "fashion" to signify an ensemble of objects and activities permeated by a deep aesthetic dimension (which I intend to articulate in the present paper), insofar as fashion involves embodied collective experiences through which is possible to create—and move into—a meaningful aesthetic space. Given my definition, I thus take fashion to be both tangible and intangible, because it implies experiential practices—such as dressing ourselves, buying and wearing items, etc.—while at the same time concerning an immaterial or non-strictly-material domain, made up of aesthetic proprieties, relations, reactions, expressions, and values.

2. *Fashion as ordinary aesthetic practice*
2.1 *Fashion within aesthetics*

The interrelation between fashion and aesthetics can be traced back to the 19th and 20th centuries, when philosophers and literati[3] displayed

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[1] While the sociological, psychological, economic, moral, political, anthropological and more other approaches to fashion are of great importance, in this paper, for reasons of space, I will concentrate on the aesthetic dimension of fashion alone.

[2] This sense of fashion might be considered closer to the concept of 'clothing' or 'dress', which are connected to fashion in a wide sense in turn.

[3] Cf. Matteucci 2019. Matteucci quotes philosophers (such as Simmel, Spencer, Benjamin and Fink) and men of literature (namely Balzac, Baudelaire, d'Annunzio, Carlyle).

an interest in the aesthetic implications of fashion for the first time. Yet, nowadays the aesthetic dimension of fashion seems to be obvious; so obvious, I believe, that it often escapes consideration. In this section, my aim is to describe the first theoretical steps that have been taken toward a rediscovery of how fashion relates to reality creating deeply aestheticized fields that permeate our ordinary life.

To give a clear account of why fashion has to be considered an aesthetic phenomenon, I shall first of all mention Iannilli's (2017) reasons concerning why fashion should be considered as one of Everyday Aesthetics' key topics. The first reason—described as "empirical"—concerns the production of the fashion items which affect our everyday life: fashion provides an ensemble of objects—e.g. clothing items and accessories—to which we refer through descriptions that pick out aesthetic qualities and properties[4]. The second reason is described as "theoretical": fashion shapes our ordinary experience and "emphasizes specific structures of the latter that cannot be neglected from a purely aesthetic point of view, since they indeed result in a very particular configuration of the aesthetic in everyday life" (Iannilli 2017: 231). Further, fashion contributes to the processes of aestheticization by creating immersive experiences of continuous consumption. Indeed, it is undeniable that fashion presents an aesthetic dimension, especially within our 'post-industrial' society, in which aesthetics "can no longer be confined within an ideal and isolated sphere such as the system of fine arts governed by the industrial society" (Matteucci 2016: 10).

Notwithstanding all of this, for long time, everyday practices and objects—such as fashion—have been considered too ephemeral or superficial to have an impact on aesthetic reflection. Only comparatively recently philosophers have turned their attention to our deeply aestheticized ordinary contexts (to which are dressing practices obviously belong). In fact, as Dewey[5] claimed, the aim "is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (Dewey 1934: 3). Everyday aesthetics (EA) aim to respond to an increasingly severe restriction of the aesthetic domain over time, which started with Kant's aesthetic account; focusing the aesthetic inquiry almost entirely on the definition of beauty and the sublime, as Kant did, caused in fact a significant art-centred shift in the discourse of aesthetics qua discipline.

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[4] For example, one can define a certain dress as 'beautiful' or 'ugly' or 'cute', etc.

[5] According to Yuriko Saito's entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Dewey is considered the forerunner of Everyday Aesthetics: focusing of the aesthetic experience of an artwork (*Art as Experience,* 1934), he encouraged to concentrate on ordinary experience, rather that artistic products, insofar the starting point of aesthetics is the aesthetic "in the raw" (Saito 2019).

Clearly, however, our everyday life deserves aesthetic scrutiny as well. And so, as Ratiu clarifies, "the scope of aesthetics [is today] expanded to include areas of everyday life previously neglected" (Ratiu 2013: 7). Specifically, daily objects and quotidian activities, such as dressing up, can now claim to belong legitimately to the scope of aesthetics, insofar as they "they contribute constantly and crucially, in everyday life, to the configuration of the taste of individuals and to the understanding of the environments that surround us and with which we interact." (Matteucci 2017: 111–112). Indeed, "the recognition of fashion's dignity as a philosophical and specifically aesthetic research topic seems to imply the necessity for a broadening of the domain of aesthetics itself, for it traditionally follows an art-centred and/or nature-centred paradigm of investigation" (Iannilli 2017: 230).

Already considering the short summary above, I think it is fair to say that the question about the correlation between fashion and the realm of aesthetic is often misinterpreted. Instead of asking "why does fashion have an aesthetic dimension?", it is more appropriate to question why the discipline of aesthetics did not consider fashion as an important topic to discuss in the first place. This sort of considerations makes clear that a reconsideration of fashion within an aesthetic framework is urgently required.

2.2 *A new aesthetic interpretation of fashion*

Concerning the aesthetic dimension of fashion, it is crucial first of all to define in which way fashion intertwines with the ordinary element. In order to give such description of fashion, I wish to introduce Matteucci's notion of hypo-aesthetic level[6], which he uses to illustrate the "presence of aesthetic elements in everyday life" (Matteucci 2016: 14).

The hypo-aesthetic level concerns the diffusion of aesthetic elements within everyday life—those elements, that is, that constantly shape our interaction with reality in an aesthetic way, working underneath the surface. As a matter of fact, human beings have always shaped their reality through aesthetic devices, for example words and images used in a non-denotative sense. The deep historical and psychological root of such aesthetic phenomena could also instruct us about the recent structural changes in our ways of experiencing reality, in which fashion plays a non-marginal role. This genetic analysis, in turn, would pave the way for the thesis that fashion constitutes—at least nowadays—a peculiar "form of life", the elements of which were already dormant in previous (non-thoroughly-aestheticized) forms of life.

From the perspective of the hypo-aesthetic level, fashion is to be

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[6] See Matteucci 2016. In contrast to the hypo-aesthetic level, Matteucci also introduces the notion of 'hyper-aesthetic level', which refers to those aesthetic elements in everyday life that can trigger experiences with an abundance of aesthetic content. Although relevant connections could be made between this level and fashion, I will not have enough space in this paper to investigate this correlation.

understood as a deep routine that "remains with people over time" (Buckley and Clark 2012: 19). In our daily life, we use and remodel fashionable clothes, again and again. Nevertheless, we usually refer to fashion in terms of regular stylistic innovation supported by an institutionalized system of production. Through this standard notion of fashion (qua innovation, perpetual change, etc.), we perceive the system of fashion as extraordinary, extravagant, uncommon: "in fact according with Buckley and Clark (2012: 20) while the extraordinariness of high fashion has been clearly visible, ordinary fashion has been resolutely invisible." However, fashion can be both: ordinary, in its everyday dimension, and extraordinary, as fashion itself sets the seasonality and the novelty. People constantly dress themselves and, in this way, depict their interpretation of the cycles of fashion. We experience fashion every day without noticing that we are experiencing it: in fact, as a proof of this inner behaviour, we dress ourselves up every day.

"The problem, as Sheringham points out (2006: 22) [is that] the everyday is beneath our attention. It is what we overlook." Dressing ourselves is such a simple task that in every moment of our daily routine it might be perceived to be obvious, precisely because the ordinary escapes notice.[7] In fashion the perception of everydayness is hard to locate because fashion is mostly identified with modernity, fastness, fleetingness. However, if we pay attention to both aspects of fashion outlined above, we can easily see that fashion is indeed able to create a conjunction between modernity (intended as velocity and variableness) and everydayness. Thus, fashion offers the possibility to set practices regarding our everyday life, combining creativity and repetitiveness: it provides the possibility of reinventing one's own image repeatedly within everyday life.

Considering what we have said so far, fashion appears as an ordinary aesthetic practice that concerns also a particular kind of objects that can acquire aesthetic properties in everyday contexts. Nevertheless, fashion is still a controversial topic within the domain of the Everyday Aesthetics, and indeed as a general aesthetic phenomenon. The problem is that fashion is and has been treated poorly with respect to other human phenomena we study, as it is considered lacking in a solid theoretical basis. The theoretical unreliability that is historically associated with fashion is due to the fact that, at first glance, it presents itself as "a bundle of problems that join together in an irregular manner" (Matteucci, 2017: 13).

There are, however, encouraging signals of change with respect to this problem. Despite the lack of systematic philosophical enquiries concerning fashion, Matteucci has recently provided a critical examination of fashion (cf. Matteucci and Marino 2017) comparing four dif-

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[7] As Wittgenstein writes: "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.) [...] And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful" (PI, § 129).

ferent aesthetic paradigms to fashion, in order to understand which one can describe fashion in the most accurate manner. Here, I wish to show that one of these paradigms, namely the one that reads the phenomenon of fashion in the light of Wittgenstein's concept of "form of life", can be the most fruitful one, if our aim is that of giving an aesthetic characterization of fashion. Thus, the purpose of my arguments below will be to demonstrate that the concept of "form of life" applied to fashion might constitute a viable paradigm for fashion, if inflected in an aesthetic manner, in terms of what I shall call "aesthetic form of life." Specifically, I will argue below that this paradigm suits fashion as an everyday practice, intended as the repetitive act of dressing ourselves up in daily life, in certain manners, which depend on the specific occasions.[8]

3. *Form of life and rules*

Matteucci's comparison uses the analytical aesthetic theory by Wollheim in *Art and its Objects* (1968): outlining what is to be understood as art and as an aesthetic, Wollheim compares art to a "form of life" using this concept in the meaning with which Wittgenstein himself explained his conception of language and language games. By "form of life" we mean therefore the set of habits, intrinsic experiences, indeed a language and its uses. Equally, to describe the aesthetic field as a "form of life" implies considering perceptive and cultural experiential practices in which the subjects involved express themselves by drawing a horizon of shared taste. However, expressing one's own horizon of taste does not mean establishing a static set of signs or indexes to represent things, that is, following a semiotic modus operandi. On the contrary, drawing a horizon of taste is to bring out the physiognomy of things in common ways, one expressing familiarity. A system of familiar aesthetic relations, in this sense, is manifested through the various forms of taste, such as art and even fashion.

I argue that the best way to describe fashion's mechanism is comparing it to the late Wittgenstenian concept of language, and in particular with the "form of life" concept. By 'form of life' we mean therefore the set of habits, intrinsic experiences, indeed a language and its uses. Wittgenstein describes this concept as an *Übereinstimmung* (agreement, concordance) in the sense of producing consensus and regularity. The intersubjective agreement within a form of life is situated in language interpreted as a universal medium and as a place of consensus and possible constitution of experience in the world (Borutti 1993: 1). Language as a form of life is a condition of a possible community.

The concept of "form of life" is tied to the concept of language, as Wittgenstein points out in *Philosophical Investigations* in § 19: "to

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[8] These occasions include, for example, going to work, to an interview, to a wedding, to a theme party, to a dinner or a business lunch, to the park, and so on.

imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" and "speaking a language is part of an activity, or a form of life" (PI, § 23). In the perspective of *Philosophical Investigations*, language is made of several language games at the same time. Language games are defined by Wittgenstein as "objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities (PI, § 130)" and are used by Wittgenstein with the intention of shedding clarity onto language. Language games are models that expand our way of looking at language and allow us to observe its multiplicity. The rules of a game are not strict: "the rule may be an aid in teaching the game (PI, § 54)": you can learn a rule either by observing a game or by playing it. In the latter case, a player can understand the rules of a game directly through practice.

In the case of language, this means that one can understand the meaning of different words in a language game and the specific rules governing their use, as the game allows access to a field of application of the words themselves (the use of the words in language). In fact, Wittgenstein affirms also that "without these rules, the word has no meaning, and if the rules change also the meaning changes" (PI, § 552). By following the rule, one can understand, at the same time, what the rule is and how to apply it.

Furthermore, "also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it" (PI, § 202). In fact, to follow a rule is a public practice as it implies the recognition of the rule by people who follow the same rule. It is impossible to follow a rule privately because following a rule is itself a practice, which requires approvals, disapprovals, gestures, orders that strengthen the rule, and so on. According to Wittgenstein, these are "grammatical annotations" on the expression of following a rule that concerns habits upon which humans agree.

4. *Wittgenstein's perspective on aesthetics*

Within an aesthetic perspective, Wittgenstein dealt with aesthetics by dealing with problems concerning the meaning of aesthetic words. Before Wittgenstein, the concept of beauty was the starting point of aesthetic reflection. However, Wittgenstein noticed that all sorts of confusions and misunderstandings arise from the analysis of the form of traditional aesthetic utterances, i.e. the Kantian type of proposition "this X is beautiful" (Johannessen 1996: 24–25). In fact, we are misled into thinking that it is possible to infer structural features of the world thanks to the structural features of the proposition: "according to Johannessen (1996: 25) we are in fact tempted to reason from language to reality." This temptation leads us to ignore all the other kinds of aesthetic judgments that, according to Wittgenstein, concern aesthetic features far more important than beauty, and that which we call beautiful.

Indeed, Wittgenstein breaches into the tradition of aesthetic enquiry claiming that it is not necessary to find a correct and universal definition of beauty, because, as with the concept of art, the borders and the application of the concept of beauty are essentially vague.

Furthermore, whenever Wittgenstein refers to aesthetic concepts, he accepts their radical indeterminacy: he claims that it is not worthful to ask for the precise definition and boundaries for aesthetics concepts because their very nature is vague.

In *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief* (LC, 1966) he mentions his disinterest in 'Aesthetic as a science', i.e. the science of the beautiful. Thereby, "Wittgenstein (LC, 2:1) starts by investigating what could be meant by 'Aesthetics'", claiming that the aesthetic field "is very big and entirely misunderstood" (LC 1:1). In fact, he points out that it is useless to focus only on terms like "beautiful" or "ugly" because in aesthetics there are a great amount of interjections and reactions to artworks or natural beauty.

Primarily, Wittgenstein concentrated on the use of aesthetic expressions and their linguistic form. He wanted to explore how and where aesthetic judgments are employed in daily life. He counters the traditional aesthetic discourse paying attention to what happens in real life, "claiming that what we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (PI, § 48). He started by reflecting on aesthetic phenomena; specifically, he was interested in situations where aesthetic disagreement arises about a given aesthetic matter. In a way, aesthetic enquiry evolves into a discussion concerning a disagreement over some artistic expression. The matter is localizing the source of what Wittgenstein called "aesthetic puzzlement": when we encounter certain artworks, we experience disquiet or aesthetic discomfort and, at the very same time, we feel confused on the source of our experience (Johannessen 2004: 17).

According to Wittgenstein, the concept of aesthetics points to whether something is working or not, if it is pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly: in other words, aesthetics means to perceive that something has the right expression (or not), the right gesture (or not). Aesthetics is about understanding why something is right or wrong, and indeed about providing reasons for this. Only by understanding why something is right (or not) it is possible to change the way a person perceives external things. Accordingly, research in aesthetics has firstly to deal with "aesthetic uncertainty", indeed with situations in which the subject feels dissatisfied or disgusted by something, but he does not know why he has this kind of reaction.

From the discussion above, however, it will also be clear that aesthetics has also to deal with an ensemble of aesthetic reactions involving expressions and gestures aimed at the object that prompts the reaction. As it was for language games, aesthetic reactions and aesthetic judgments display family resemblances: expressions like "beautiful" or "awful" are used in our linguistic practices as interjections, particularly

when we experience an artwork. In fact, as Wittgenstein points out, aesthetic reactions are of great significance in addressing the concept of aesthetics (cf. LC, 2:10); and from aesthetic reactions, such as interjections, will derive aesthetic language games (cf. LC, 1:5). Through aesthetic reactions, we can go back to the reason—as opposed to the cause—which motivates our aesthetic reactions. "According to the 1933's lessons (MWL, 9:30) a reason in aesthetics is a reason for having this word in this place rather than that; this musical phrase rather than that. Reason = justification."

The aim is trying to resolve our aesthetic puzzlement by giving aesthetic explanations. Indeed, as Wittgenstein (MWL, 9:27) pointed out: "The question of Aesthetics is not: Do you like it? But, if you do, why do you?."

The kinds of reasons we appeal to when we try to resolve our aesthetic perplexity are not causal explanations. Aesthetic impressions and reactions cannot be explained by external-causal matters: "There is a 'Why?' to aesthetic discomfort not a 'cause' to it" (LC, 2:19). Wittgenstein rejected considering aesthetics a branch of psychology because it is not possible to explain aesthetic experience through causal explanations (Glock 1996: 33). "He firmly pointed out in his 1933's lessons (MWL, 9:32) that the reasons have nothing to do with psychology." Indeed, Wittgenstein's aim is to formulate a grammatical explanation.

We can explain our aesthetic reactions through a better understanding of the work of art itself, which proceeds linguistically. Aesthetic explanation is descriptive; therefore, it is possible to distinguish between our aesthetic reactions and their reasons: "What reasons could I give for being satisfied? They are in the nature of further descriptions" (MWL, 9:31).

Wittgenstein talked about rules also within the aesthetic frame. In fact, the use of language is thus the object of study of aesthetics. As we have seen, in his 1933 lectures (MWL, 4b), Wittgenstein already pointed out that beauty has no central relevance in aesthetics. In fact, it is rare to use terms such as "beautiful", "magnificent", "fine", "ugly" in aesthetics. Words or expressions such as "beautiful" are not so important in our discussion of artworks: "beautiful" is only one type of word, that we can encounter at best sometimes. Later, during the 1938 lessons, Wittgenstein reiterated his account, highlighting that only he who has a lack in aesthetic competence uses aesthetic adjectives such as "beautiful" or "magnificent".

Indeed, our aesthetic competence is tied to aesthetic rules: "Wittgenstein (LC, 1:11) asked in fact what rule are we using or referring to when we say: 'This is the correct way'? If a music teacher says a piece should be played this way and plays it, what is he appealing to?." This question is not as easy as one might think, and it requires an account of aesthetic rules in the first place, and their correlation with aesthetic judgements (such as the teacher's one).

Familiarity with a set of aesthetic rules is a necessary condition for giving a competent aesthetic judgment according to the criteria of aesthetic correctness or aesthetic incorrectness (with respect to a given rule). It is also fundamental in aesthetic reasoning, and thus needed to make someone see what you see in art. Aesthetic judgment works in the same way; in fact, for Wittgenstein, what gives meaning to our aesthetic judgment are not merely the words contained in it, but the complex of cultural contexts and human activities in which we can actually find the usage of these words (Shusterman 1986: 98).

The essential point is this: the more our knowledge of aesthetic rules is accurate, the more our aesthetic judgment will be appropriate. In fact, as Wittgenstein claimed, aesthetic rules are vital to aesthetic judgments: he clarified that "if I hadn't learnt the rules, I wouldn't be able to make the aesthetic judgement. In learning the rules, you get a more and more refined judgement. Learning the rules actually changes your judgement" (LC, 1:15). This means that, although aesthetic judgment is constrained by rules at any given time, it is also possible to acquire a "feeling for the rules" (Novitz 2004: 58), which opens the possibility to refine our aesthetic judgements over time. Moreover, aesthetic rules are embodied in our culture, which of course does change over time as well.

The meaning of an aesthetic judgment, and indeed of all the aesthetic activities that surround it, can be found within the socio-cultural context in which the judgement is used, and thus, ultimately, in its role in our "way of living". In a way, our paradigms of aesthetic evaluation are as obscure or complicated as is their intertwining with our form of cultural life: they cannot be easily grasped by concepts. In fact, expressions of aesthetic judgement show complicated roles within the culture of an historic period. According to Wittgenstein, the entire evaluative aesthetic paradigm is pluralistic: aesthetic judgments differ in different historical contexts, they assume a diverse meaning. Wittgenstein supports an aesthetic paradigm characterized by historical pluralism or contextualism. Within this perspective aesthetic concepts,—i.e. beauty, ugliness, art, aesthetic appreciation, and so on—are made and shaped inside a culture and a period in human history: they change as societies change. Shusterman has in fact affirmed that "our aesthetic concepts are inextricably bound up in our form of life, in ways of living which change over history through social, technical and even theoretical developments" (1986: 99). To understand and describe an aesthetic language game it seems necessary to acquire what Johannessen defines as the "forms of behaviour relevant to art" (2004: 28). Adopting aesthetic practices is fundamental in order to develop aesthetic sensitivity within the aesthetic field.

Thereby, Wittgenstein's description of the aesthetic field might to lead us to a dead-end. Aesthetic judgements—and, consequently aesthetic rules, concepts, meanings and patterns of reasoning—cannot

always be clear to us. Indeed, if we accept that our aesthetic concepts have a plurality of uses, as well as variable, context-dependent conditions of application, to determine an aesthetic concept would mean to describe the entire field of our aesthetic judgments, which in turn would mean describing an entire culture. At best, this is extremely difficult; at worse, it might be impossible to provide such detailed descriptions of cultures. Practising aesthetic evaluation will be just as difficult as to succeed in clarifying the aesthetic concepts of someone who is not familiar with a given culture, and therefore with the set of aesthetic rules in force within it. In the same way, aesthetic reasoning is therefore limited by our language games "which constitute our aesthetic form of life" (Shusterman 1986: 105).

5. *Fashion as an aesthetic form of life*

Keeping in mind what we have said so far about the aesthetic paradigms that can describe the evolution of fashion and considering the Wittgensteinian concepts we have addressed (PI, MWL and LC), it is now possible to delineate an aesthetic theory of fashion's mechanism. Our thesis—namely that fashion works as a "form of life"—involves Matteucci's claims on the possibility of comparing fashion to Wollheim's aesthetic theory. In this sense, fashion can be a "form of life" within a Wittgensteinian perspective. In order to demonstrate this thesis, we must apply the concept of "form of life" to fashion and see if and how this theory works.

First of all, we can note that dressing ourselves involves a set of actions that are (or are not) in agreement with aesthetic rules. That said, these rules are not normative impositions which impose us a way to dress. As Wittgenstein saw, the understanding of rules can never be exhausted by the process of rule-formulation; similarly, rules in fashion are not verbal or written fixed expressions of an *impositio* and the teaching of rules is not a mere explanation of the rule itself. The rules in aesthetics have blurred boundaries.[9] They are not eternal, since they are tied to the context in which they are to be followed as well as to the historical period in which they develop. Indeed, the aesthetic rules that govern the activity of dressing follow a temporal cyclic evolution immanent to fashion itself. Moreover, as Appelqvist affirms "the rules can be changed and abandoned as we go along" (2019: 988): the nature of grammatical rules is arbitrary (cf. MWL 7:2).

This is also the reason why it is rather hard to set an example of aesthetic rule in fashion once and for all. For aesthetic rules do not exist as platonic entities that determine how to dress properly for a specific occasion; rather, they are formed by abstraction from our daily

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[9] Along with the concept of language game, in which the rules are employed in order to play (Cf. PI §71) and the correlated meaning.

practice[10]. Thus, in following a rule, one does follow an aesthetic ideal: aesthetic rules in fashion lie "in a certain consistency of our reactions and preferences, and [they] change over time (Schroeder 2020: 13). In this sense, dressing everyday according to aesthetic rules recalls Wittgenstein's concept of "following a rule": the act of dressing is a practice, indeed an action that we perform regularly, i.e. in accordance to certain rules or norms.

The notion of 'rule' is tied with what Wittgenstein called "language game."[11] Applying Wittgenstein's view to fashion results in the realization that, in dressing up for different occasions and contexts, we play different aesthetic language games with different aesthetic rules.[12] The analogy with games lets us see that, as the rules of a game change depending on the game we play, aesthetic rules might vary from one aesthetic context to another too (cf. MWL 8:87). Consequently, the meaning of a certain dress can change depending upon the context and the aesthetic rules that govern it. In fact, the meaning of clothes is dependent on the "use" we make of them in different ordinary contexts. Just as the meaning of a word can change according to its use and the context of its employment of, in the same way a garment worn in a certain way or in a certain place and time can acquire different meanings. Thus, the meaning and the sense of a dress are, to a certain extent, fluid.

The assemblage of rules—by which we can play different language games—and the correlated meanings form what Wittgenstein called "grammar". In my proposed analogy, this means that in the ordinary language of dressing we appeal to what I have labeled "the grammar of dressing". Similarly to Wittgenstein's linguistic perspective, it is possible to grasp intuitively the grammar of dressing through "a synoptic view of the grammatical system as a whole" (Appelqvist 2019: 989).[13] This way of looking at grammar does not allow to find a "conceptually determinable foundation for those norms" (Appelqvist 2019: 989): it is an expression of a 'intuitive' method to grasp meanings. Nonetheless, this does not imply that aesthetic rules cannot be defined as normative rules, as long as we consider them as part of a grammatical framework which is not eternal. Indeed, the aesthetic rules "are constitutive of the system themselves, given in the actual practices of language use" (Appelqvist 2017: 138): they are funded in the ordinary context of our routine by the repetitive action that we make when we get dressed.

To those who do not know their meaning, the rules of fashion are explained in the same way the meaning of a certain word or proposition

[10] When I say "This isn't the colour I mean; it's too cold", I don't hallucinate the colour I mean to find what ideal we're directed to, you must look at what we do: the ideal is the tendency of people who create such a thing (MWL, 9:22).

[11] Cf. section 2.

[12] One language game in fashion can be defined as "dressing to go to work" or "dressing to go to a wedding" and so on.

[13] "Taking something in as a whole at a glance" (MWL 8:59).

can be explained to someone who does not speak a certain language. In fact, precise training is required to dress properly. Partly, this training is also linguistic, for if someone is not able to understand the meaning of some clothes, then we can teach them to use fashion-related words through examples and by practice.[14] However, at the ultimate level, fashion requires a precise training in which what matters the most are the influences given by "expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement" (cf. PI, § 208).

With exercise and training one can access the "grammar of dressing" (i.e. the set of rules on how to dress) thanks to which it is possible to learn, on the one hand, to apply the rules in the right context, and on the other hand to acquire a competent judgment on fashion-related matters.[15] This way, we can become sensitive to the rules that govern the phenomenon of fashion. And the more we become sensitive to these rules, the more we will be likely to become experts in the field of fashion. By becoming familiar with the "grammar of dressing" it is also possible to create interpretative spaces of fashion, which contribute to creating new rules of and for fashion. The fashion expert, he or she who understands fashion, is the yardstick with which to compare oneself when one is trained in fashion.

Fashion is also a source of aesthetic reactions: a shorter or longer dress can cause in us an uncomfortable reaction that can be expressed in a sign of disapproval (verbal, gestural or facial expression), as well as reactions of appreciation.[16] The frequent use of the garment denotes the pleasure one feels towards the dress, vice versa, not wearing a dress denotes dissatisfaction. In this sense, the use of a garment can express both the meaning of a dress in a certain context and the pleasure and tastes we have in aesthetic terms for certain garments. Furthermore, we can express in fashion aesthetic judgments based on aesthetic criteria of correctness. In fact, when we make an aesthetic judgment in fashion, we refer to a set of more or less evident rules, indicating the correctness (or not) of certain items of clothing or accessories.[17] But how do we know when a fashion's match is aesthetically

[14] Expressions such as "I love your skirt" or "This jacket suits you better than that one" or "This colour doesn't suit you" might be a reference to the linguistic training. Moreover, approval or disapproval, like or dislike, uncertainty and indecision can be expressed also through gestures: smiling, raising the eyebrows, rolling eyes and so on.

[15] Sensibility to the grammar of dressing is shown in our ability to discern which garment is best for each occasion (such as a white shirt for a job interview or a long dress for a wedding). Once one will acquire sensibility to the rules and context, one will be more competent in giving fashion judgments, which are expressed with advices and suggestions.

[16] A clear example is given in LC 1:13.

[17] One can express an aesthetic judgment towards a garment in every context. For example, if I'm wearing a suit or a *tailleur* for my first day at work in a formal environment, I can receive aesthetic judgments expressing correctness for my choice. Otherwise, if I'm wearing a cyan suit with amber shoes, I can receive aesthetic

correct or wrong? Here, close to the aesthetic concept of correctness, we encounter another central Wittgensteinian notion, namely the notion of the "clicking".

A "click" might be configured as a perception of correctness, which, applied to fashion, allows its functioning and diffusion. In fact, since the rules of fashion are conceptually difficult to grasp, the parameter of fashion-related judgments would also be difficult to understand if the "clicking" did not come into play. The "click" is an indication of correctness and, therefore, it is nothing more than a last proof of the correct to follow a certain rule. And it is thanks to this correctness index that we can better identify the rules that fashion dictates from time to time (cf. LC 2:8).

There are indeed some problems with this aesthetic paradigm of fashion. The first one is that the set of rules to which we appeal daily in dressing and within which aesthetic judgments are developed are almost never explicit and clear. It is very difficult (if not practically impossible) to draw up an exhaustive list of rules according to which to dress in everyday life and which are able to provide us with a stable criterion of aesthetic judgment. This difficulty emerges both at a broad level, namely the level of the basic rules of everyday dressing, and at a more specific level, dealing with the seasonality of fashion.

Since understanding and describing the rules that govern fashion is almost as difficult as defining the use of expressions of aesthetic judgment. To have a chance to succeed in understanding aesthetic judgements, you need to be familiar with the kind of aesthetic rules that govern fashion. However, to be familiar with these types of rules does not amount necessarily to be experts in the field of fashion, e.g. a stylist. It just means we can express aesthetic judgments concerning fashion, which, like the rules of fashion itself, are intimately connected with the culture of a certain historical period.

The solution to this problem could be to look at our analogy with language games: dressing up in fashion, or dressing for a specific occasion (a wedding, a theme party, etc.) are nothing more than different language games. And only by playing one game rather than another is it possible to understand the rules that guide it: in the same way it is therefore possible to understand the rules and aesthetic reactions that guide fashion. In fact, the correctness of a certain dress for a given context only emerges when two people play the same language game and can therefore assess what is right or wrong in clothing. By sharing the same language game of fashion, it is possible to grasp the rules that determine it. In this sense, we can define fashion as a particular "form of life".

judgements expressing the incorrectness of my dressing choice. In the latter case, the colour combination of cyan and amber can be followed by discomfort or disgust by the observers.

6. *Conclusions*

To conclude, considering what we have discussed so far, we can say that the combination of Wittgenstein's aesthetic-linguistic paradigm with fashion works: in fact, the meaning of a dress can change depending on the context; the rules that fashion follows are not eternal, and therefore reconcile with the properties of cyclicality and the ephemeral being of fashion. Thus, the meaning of a dress will also change as the rules concerning how to dress change. This set of rules constitutes a grammar proper to fashion, or a "grammar of dressing." Further, the practice of following a rule is consolidated thanks to a mimetic training trough which it is possible to acquire sensitivity to the rules, and thereby to becoming experts with respect to the rule. Since these rules are not eternal, it is possible to modify some of them, giving space to the need for differentiation and expression of one's identity, while at the same time not disregarding criteria of correctness or incorrectness of the way of dressing.

We can therefore say that fashion is a constellation of aesthetic language games—interpreted as sets of linguistic and cultural practices that constantly intertwine—or indeed an aesthetic language with a grammar of its own. Indeed, a form of life organizes the set of human practices in cultural and historical communities, and fashion could be one of these historical and cultural practices, which however structures or organizes itself according to its own, time-bound rules. Consider again Simmel's concept of fashion: the trickle-down theory was a model of nineteenth-century fashion that, however, can no longer be said to be valid in our times. The society of the time displayed a hierarchical structure that defined the value of fashion in a different way than today. As a result, fashion was closely linked to social and economic values of the time: it was a symbol of unequivocal social status. The relationships between social classes were rigidly vertical with respect to our society, in which, instead, there are opposite horizontal forces that guide the economic criteria of diffusion of fashion. The theoretical model of fashion outlined by Simmel was related to the *Lebensform* in which he himself lived. Simmel had, on the one hand, the great merit of discovering one of the key principles of the mechanism of fashion, namely the imitation-differentiation dialectic. On the other hand, its theoretical model cannot perfectly describe the trend of fashion today as we do not share the same form of life.

As a last test of the juxtaposition of the concepts of language game and fashionable life-form, a brief thought experiment might be helpful. Imagine being taken, without warning from the year 2019 to the year 1860, during the Victorian era on a busy street in London at the time. The first thing that passers-by intuitively would notice is how you are dressed: the substantial differences between the garments of the time (with lace, large skirts and showy hats with feathers) and today's way of dressing. Likely, even gestures and movements will be completely

different between you and nineteenth-century Londoners. In addition to this, even good taste will have completely different standards and criteria: therefore, the aesthetic judgment of nineteenth-century Londoners towards your way of dressing will, most probably, be based on the observation that your clothes are not the correct ones.

A form of life, in fact, can create shared horizons in which mutual understanding is possible and in which a sense of belonging to a socio-cultural community is formed. Fashion as a form of life, in the same way, draws horizons of taste shared by the community in which to recognize oneself aesthetically. Thus, fashion as an aesthetic practice gives life to various forms of practices concerning good taste, outlining the rules that contribute to the 'grammar of dressing' of one's time: it forms a common aesthetic sense in which to move in the daily context of life. In this sense, we can say that fashion is an aesthetic form of life.

References

List of Abbreviations

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PI	1958 *Philosophical Investigations / Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Transl. by G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees. Second edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
LC	1966, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious belief*: From the Notes of Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees, and James Taylor. C. Barrett (ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

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