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FASHIONING IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses the way in which individual and collective identities are constructed through fashions in the contemporary western world. The reciprocal and interdependent relationship of processually emergent identities, and fashion as a system of cultural representation, is initially established. The argument maintains that certain theoretical explanations of fashion have marginalised this component of the fashion process, and the aim of the thesis is to place the often contradictory junctures of fashions and identities in positions of central importance in the consideration of fashion dynamics. The argument critically reviews different feminist explanations of fashion, and the implications these have for feminist debates around gender and gender identity. The thesis further examines the sociological debates around modernism and postmodernism, and evaluates the contributions of this debate for both the study of fashion, and feminist understandings of identities. The research concludes that contemporary theoretical shifts in the investigation of fashions and identities are the fruition of a `long revolution' in sociological theory and practice, which indicate important developments for the future resolution of critical problems in the theory of style and politics.

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I have named those who were unknowingly my workers and precursors...

Neitzche
The Will to Power

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CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITIES, FASHIONS, DIFFERENCES

> This ambivalence is that of contradictory and irreconcilable desires... Fashion - a performance art - acts as a vehicle for this ambivalence; the daring of fashion speaks dread as well as desire; the shell of chic, the aura of glamour, always hides a wound.
>
> Elizabeth Wilson
> *Adorned in Dreams*

Fashion is an endless spectacle, a private and public theatre in which the play of mutable appearance incessantly redefines the self. In each facet of everyday life we see the unfolding performance of fashion's pageant, a process of dynamic inscription and recreation which transforms the body, the psyche and subjective life. The procession of media into the 1990s - electronic boxes of light and sound, black print and graphic image - document the increasingly chaotic and schizophrenic signs of style. Amongst the collapse of distinction between designer fashion and street style, fashion culture in the 1980s and '90s has proliferated as never before into texts and subtexts of retro, nostalgia, irony, parody, juxtaposition and bricolage. Carefully contrived fashion magazines have shifted from the representation of designer `looks' to a new consumerism in which the array of style signals an exhibition of identity grounded in appearance. Fashion becomes an `identity (i-D) parade' (Evans and Thornton: 1989) of spectacle and surveillance in which the signifiers of difference spread in exponential mutation.

The central question emerging from this dislocated morass of graphic image, is how individuals perceive a sense of self, through the mechanisms of fashion; a sense of

`being' in and consciousness of particular social locations. Does fashion enable individuals to `make a statement' about who they are through what they wear, or are individuals themselves `fashioned' by images presented in a media culture? Can groups express common values in their utilisation of different fashions? The subjective sense of `self' as an integrated person, an entity in interaction with other social subjects in groups which share similar characteristics, is (provisionally and in debate) referred to as identity. The central problem of this thesis is the relation of identities to fashions, and the means through which these are co-formative.

Fashion is a critical social and cultural site at which identity is negotiated, a field in which a constellation of differentiating processes merge and re-emerge. Identity is constituted in this difference, in the shifting demarcations and definitions of meaning which negate, designate, and represent. The networks of meaning which comprise cultures are created through the depiction of difference in opposition, placed in relation to junctures of other opposition. The creation of difference within and between selves, in the recognition of the self as in difference to the other, at points of juncture with the difference between selves and between others, creates the network of meanings which comprise identities. The individual in opposition to the collective, the natural as against the artificial, the material as against the ideal, the body in opposition to the psyche, construct the normative parameters of being in contemporary western society. Yet each aspect of opposition and differentiation is itself constituted in ambivalence and ambiguity, in the liminal and marginal positions of culture, in the points at which boundaries are contested and challenged.

The argument that follows is also framed by the struggle over difference. As text, it is discursively positioned in relation to diverse and sometimes contradictory analytical debates around the nature of the self, identities and fashions in contemporary western society. Within the context of this argument, identities (specifically in the plural) are generally understood as processes and practices of social interaction, as sets of social relationships that are incessantly open to renegotiation and redeployment. Fashions, especially in their articulation as images, are conceived as commodified forms of cultural representation which are simultaneously positioned as signifying practices in

cultural discourses. Identities and fashions are aligned in relationships of both difference and similarity, a process of convergence, coalescence and rupture at the points of representational juncture between a host of discourses around the individual, the collective, the economic, the corporeal, the psychological and the political. Identities are created and maintained through the vagaries of fashion, played through its signifying practices and deployed around its representations.

Identities are, however, simultaneously beyond fashion; their expressions are found in a multitude of social interactions in diverse historical and cultural contexts. Fashion is also concurrently greater than the sum total of subjective expressions found within its representational practices, and is different from the infinite range of social practices through which identities are maintained and transformed. Identities and fashions are constructed alongside each other in dialectics of positional negotiation which perpetually reinscribe the boundaries of difference. Neither individual/collective identities nor group/personal fashions can be considered prefigurative as such, but should instead be regarded as peculiarly intimate discursive practices at both the material and ideological levels.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the concept of `identity'; the means through which identity has been conceptualised in the literature of social science; and the way in which identity has been conceived as constituted in ambiguous relationships of difference. Identity is not a thing-in-itself, but rather emergent processes-in-transformation; fragmentary social practices which ground the individual and the collective in contradictory and often paradoxical social and cultural circumstances. The constitution of collective and individual identity is in the representational boundaries of likeness and difference, in the moment at which the other is recognised in similarity to the self, and the self may become the stranger. Identities as continually emergent processes negate neither structuring forces of power nor the practices of individuals, but rather specify points at which the individual is interpellated, where identity is positioned rather than structured, momentarily `fixed' rather than determined. The boundaries between these aspects of opposition are always in question, contingent both experientially and theoretically. Identities are

therefore ambivalent, caught between opposing, contradictory and oscillating subjective states of attitude, approach, desire and power. This text addresses, in theoretical terms, the contingencies of experience.

Fashion is a particularly appropriate means through which to trace the paradoxical vagaries of identities, as fashion is itself an ambivalent cultural form, infused with contradictory desires and activities. It is a particularly precarious and elusive phenomenon to theorise because it refers to more than one set of social practices and behaviours at any one time. Fashion is simultaneously art and mass pastime, work and play; a signification of both reality and fiction, banality and theatrics. It is both producer and product, ubiquitous yet specific; and is concurrently both an intensely individual ideal and a mass hallucination, a collective practice and an individualising culture. The analysis of fashion therefore not only includes close scrutiny of the multiple aspects of social life of which fashion forms an integral part, but similarly those aspects of fashion apparatus and practice which are informed by the interaction of social dynamics in the formation of self. Fashion so closely integrates the body and the psyche in a social self that it becomes a sartorial space where many different ideas, ideals and discourses meet. Neither identity nor fashion are determining, but are instead adjuncts associated in largely indeterminate relationships of creation and transformation. Identities and fashions therefore cannot be analysed through simple reference to any singular academic discipline, nor simplistically incorporated into any number of wider academic or cultural discourses which necessarily seek to explain fashion through explanations centred in differential social dynamics which ignore fashion's own fluctuating logics.

Many explanations of fashion have marginalised the centrality of identities in fashion's movements. Fashion is often characterised as the irrational and ephemeral expression of more determinative social phenomena, rather than as a social and cultural process that is always `relatively' autonomous. A critical review of social science literature on fashion establishes the singular and univocal disposition of many writers towards the interdependence and contradictory processes in formative practices of fashion and identities. Identities and fashions are however, as I see it, plural and

interactive rather than singular phenomena, and thus require forms of theorising which acknowledge experiential ambivalence, indeterminacy and ambiguity. While it is arguable that social theory is itself largely indeterminable (Levine:1985), the analysis of identities and fashions requires perseverance in the face of cultural and theoretical vacillation. The final section of the first chapter addresses important theoretical debates on the character of social relationships as both structured and multiple, and discusses the implications of theorising identity in fashion for the conceptualisation of identity more generally.

The way in which fashion is theorised - in all its ambiguity and ambivalence - has important implications for the conception of `identity', and the implied relationship between the self and cultural artefacts in wider social contexts. A theoretical form is needed which at once acknowledges ambiguous processes in identities and culture, but at the same time explores the possibilities presented by contingent points of intersection with foundational theory on the left. At once, this notion raises the spectre of politics; the question of whether politics **requires** some sense of `identity' on which political actiivity must be predicated. Theorising is inherently a political activity, based as it is on the dynamics of power-as-knowledge. Attempting to specify the junctures at which identities are positioned within cultural networks further implicates the specification of power relations within those networks which establish the cultural as political. While this argument generally concentrates more upon fashion as a critical site of identity formations and the means through which these are conceptualised, the notion of identities as multiple and ambiguous immediately problematises the realm of politics. The recognition of identities as constructed through political interventions is therefore an important contributing factor within the argument: however, given the considerable scope of debate around identities and politics within sociological literature, the question of politics necessarily remains a problem - a range of interrogations in this particular context - rather than an inventory of resolutions for theory and politics more generally.

Gender and gender identity are contentious concepts within sociological and feminist debates around the nature of `the political' and its relationship to social analytics.

Chapter Two introduces the notion of gender as an integral component of identity processes, especially in relation to the positioning of the feminine other in fashion's catalogue of difference. The discussion argues that the concept of gender has developed a specifically foundational definition and usage within the (predominantly feminist) literature pertaining to processes of gender and gender identity. Gender has often become a singular and monolithic category with which to understand complex social and historical processes, and this applies to the analysis of fashion no less than it does to the feminist literature of gender more generally. A perusal of various feminist explanations of fashion identifies, in different aspects, the difficulties apparent in the deployment of gender identity as a foundational component of feminist social thought. If identities are considered essential by virtue of their basis in personal experience, an unquestionable `hierarchy of oppression' is established which dictates the parameters of both political `correctness' and ideological division.

A significant number of feminist scholars are, however, challenging a politics of exclusion and moralism predicated on abstract identity hierarchies; a politics similar in form to that of the institutional practices and prejudices that feminisms seek to criticise. There are genealogies of emergence in different feminist theories of subjective identities which are attempting to grapple with the indeterminacy of gender dynamics and the ambiguity of philosophical thought in relation to the unstable concept of gender. Ambivalence, ambiguity, fluidity and contradiction are emerging as central tropes in the analysis of the socially `fashioned' self. Different feminist theories of fashion, considered throughout the discussion in both fluid and `ideal typical' form, demonstrate cross-currents of feminist thought which variously specify disparate and conflicting philosophical assumptions around `identity'. The argument proposes that the most useful feminist approaches to the question of fashion are those that acknowledge a prevailing ambiguity in fashionable cultural forms, while preserving a concern with the means through which individuals are positioned in fluctuating social relations of power. The final section of Chapter Two investigates the implications these positional explorations have for feminist theories of the subject, and the creation of feminist narratives which recognise the provisional and relative character of identities across specific political, cultural and historical contexts.

Prompted by the consideration of feminist theories of the subject, the argument necessarily returns to a reconsideration and extension of the debate around politics and identities initiated in the previous chapter. If the category of `gender identity' can no longer be considered stable, feminist politics become problematic. Questions regarding the fundamental basis of feminist politics become central, as does an interrogation of the relationship between feminist theories of the subject and feminist politics. The formidable proportions of these debates preclude any comprehensive consideration of their possible resolutions however. The discussion rather focuses specifically on those elements of the discussion which might be central in future feminist examinations of fashion as a highly ambiguous cultural site in which identity is positioned and reformulated.

Most recently, the recognition of dislocation and fragmentation in identities - both within feminisms and beyond - has been framed through and around the debate between modernism and postmodernism. This is particularly the case in consideration of contemporary fashion, often cited as the epitome of experiential postmodernity in its display of irony and parody, its concern with surface, style and image. The discussion throughout Chapter Three challenges the parameters and substantive issues of the interchange between the protagonists of postmodernism and the defenders of modernism on several counts. The argument discusses various paradigmatic and axiomatic definitions of theories of modernism and postmodernism, modernity and postmodernity. In the course of this discussion it becomes apparent that the definition or representation of both `modernism' and `postmodernism' becomes artificially monolithic and singular through the process of theory constructed in opposition. This organisation ignores not only the ambiguity intrinsic to those representations which appear univocal, but contradicts the analysis of social knowledge (as a criticism of `meta-narratives') to which `postmodernism' is purported to adhere. The argument is not that any particular position which is described as postmodernist is erroneous *per se*, but is rather to suggest that social theory cannot conceive of the postmodern in any generic sense. We cannot define what postmodernism `is', as it `is' as ambiguous as any other theoretical or cultural form. Positions characterised as `postmodern' include such divergent modes of thought as Lyotard's (1979/1984) `little narratives',

Derrida's (1978) deconstruction, Irigaray's (1985) morphological symbolism, Jameson's (1983,1984) marxism and Kroker and Cook's (1987) excremental culture. These different texts can be no more simplistically conflated into paradigmatic form than can a criticism of one be assumed as a criticism of any other. Furthermore, these challenges apply equally to the different forms of thought standing in opposition to postmodernism, usually termed the modernist. The **terms** of the debate, then, are terms that are questionable; when specific junctures or interrelationships between fashions and identities are taken as the central points in analysis, the simplistically constructed opposition between postmodernism and modernism is found insufficient in understanding the potentially endless permutations of position, and the **specificity** of each prevalent configuration of shifting identities.

What, then, are the implications of these criticisms for feminist social theories of relational and provisional gender (and other) identities in the schizophrenic world of fashion? The continuing discussion in Chapter Three centres around the possibilities of specific theories, often characterised as postmodern (but not necessarily accepted by their authors as such) for the development of a feminist epistemology of ambiguity and ambivalence. In the final section, I argue that feminisms and postmodernisms - as unstable and plural categories - conjoin at certain useful premises, even if these junctures are rather troubled. Creative insights have, I think, emerged from the attempted integration of postmodern thought by the contemporary left. Feminisms are questioning their own terms of reference in relation to the postmodern, resulting in a simultaneous affirmation and breaching of previously stable conceptual catagories such as identity, gender and difference - in the field of fashion as much as any other. Some of the most productive literature on fashion emerging from the connections between the political left and theories of postmodernity, are those attempting this dual project; the consideration of simultaneous fixity and fluctuation in identities and fashions on the one hand, and on the other an awareness of specific political problems and questions which are implied by indeterminate theories of the subject. Dick Hebdige (1979,1988), Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton (1989,1991), and Angela McRobbie (1989,1991a) for example, have variously theorised the implications of fashion/politics, the latter two in direct relation to feminist thought. A reading of these

specifically `ambiguous' texts suggests a productive agenda of theoretical and empirical research in the study of identities and/in fashions, and offers directions in the debate around the social subject as the political subject in sociological thought.

The final chapter summarises the thesis and focuses attention again on its central themes. To posit social identity as intimately (although not singularly) constructed through cultural forms such as fashion, is not to imply that subjective identity is **determined** in any final sense. Identities are produced and `generated' rather than ultimately established in foundational form. Identity, as a predominantly ambiguous **effect**, is neither structured in a determining sense, nor entirely arbitrary and/or fictitous. Thus, to assert the construction of subjective identities through social and cultural mechanisms is not necessarily to subscribe to a structural determinism of which agency is the antithesis. As Butler (1990:147) argues, `(c)onstruction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible.'

Conversely, however, theories of identities in fashion must somehow strive to specify points of difference in representation - the social sites at which identities become `frozen' for an instant in social patterns of power and domination - and at the same time recognise these junctures as open to fluidity in meaning and interpretation, subject to material and ideological positioning, debate and challenge. The conceptualisation of identity as **emergent**, as **effect**, opens foundational identities to question; it might specify particular points of interpellation in systems of power, but continues to question the ways in which identities change in specific social, political and cultural contexts. If the political is situated within those processes and signifying practices which maintain and regulate identities, then the political project becomes one in which the experience of ambiguity, ambivalence and indeterminacy in identity is exemplified in the means by which it is described, explained and enacted. This enterprise is highly problematic, and certainly contentious in both theoretical and political terms. On the one hand, for example, feminisms are struggling to integrate the multiplicity of subject positionings open to social identities, while maintaining a political basis somehow configured around `women' as a social group. On the other

hand, feminisms attempt to specify the distinctive localities at which women's identities are structured in social relations of power and domination, while simultaneously theorising a plurality of cultural and political practices.

ADDENDUM

Within every narrative, there is a counter-narrative of silence and absence in which the first is always grounded. This narrative is no exception. It arises out of the processes of identity which mark myself as both narrator and subject in a historically specific space, and as such those silences which I (the signifier which dennotes an individual both enabled and restricted through its construction, open as ever to renegotiation) might identify in this moment should be explicitly recognised.

Within the politics of identities, the voice of others, black voices (an identity constructed through politics, rather than a politics based in identity), have been growing stronger in recent years. The black critique of racism, of marginalisation, of imposed silence - directed at both normative social science and at the feminist movement - has begun to retrieve and reconstruct the lost histories and narratives of many of the myriad of black experiences, black subject positions and black identities. The (particular) positions of women of colour within the context of fashion and style; the means through which specific dynamics of fashions become aspects of the recovery of black consciousness and the ongoing reconstruction of black identities; the means through which black identities are positioning fashion and its dissemination throughout the representations and significations of identities in fashion, remain largely unaccounted within cultural studies fashion literature. Black feminisms and black `women' in particular are an integral component of these relationships, and should be recognised as such both within the academy and beyond. This thesis contains little discussion of the way ethnic identities are constituted through and expressed in the dynamics of fashion and style, simply because there is a paucity of research within the academic institution in these areas. These silences then, black

silences, might be recognised as present, but should be made explicit. There are other absences also. Lesbian women, women with disabilities, older women, and others that have yet to be identified, are all marginalised within the text for much the same reasons as those of ethnic voices. Fashion is somehow considered inapplicable to these different groups in the normative sense, they are considered `outside' of fashion's discourses and signifying processes by social science and/or feminism. These narratives too, should be recognised in the text as marginalised.

CHAPTER TWO

(a la) MODES OF IDENTITY

(1) THE SUBJECT OF IDENTITY

> Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question.
>
> Jane Gallop
> *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*

Identity, as a component of the process of subjectification, is central in all social processes and relationships, and as such has recently become the subject of closer scrutiny - and the source of singular contention - within social science. The philosophical Cartesian subject of grounded being, and the psychological discourse of a continuous developmental `dialectic of selfhood' were historically accepted foundational premises in enlightenment social philosophy (Hall:1991:42). Since the challenges of Freud and Marx to the (fictional) rational and fully cognisant enlightenment subject however, the concept of identity has remained theoretically problematic, the only source of agreement within debate being that identity is multi-dimensional and multi-functional (Fitzgerald:1974:2).

In a general sense, it is useful to initially conceive of identities as the construction of social relationships which differentiate a sense of self from that which is not the self; the other. This implies two distinct but interrelated dynamics of constituting **difference**, through which processes of identity are constructed. Firstly, the process

implies the ongoing self-constitution, examination and management of a set of social beliefs, values and practices which construct an individual's relationship to the social world. Secondly the dynamic includes the way in which this self-concept is transversed by powerful social relationships of inclusion and exclusion which mediate the way in which the Other/Self perceives the Self/Other; which necessarily implies the constitutive **social** character of the individual.

> All identities are constituted within a system of social relations and require the reciprocal recognition of others. Identity is not to be considered a `thing', but rather a `system of relations and representations'... the maintenance of an agent's identity is... a continual process of recomposition rather than a given one, in which the two constitutive dimensions of self-identification and affirmation of difference are continually locked... (Schlesinger, in Morley and Robins:1989:15).

In both these instances, the activities surrounding the construction of self-identity, and collective identity, focus on `the need for distinction - or, which amounts to the same, of the acquisition of an unambiguous location inside the social order' (Bauman:1991:223).

Identities are, however, very seldom unambiguous. Throughout this chapter, and the ensuing argument, I want to characterise identities as perpetual process, as continuously **emergent**. This encapsulates many of the characterisations of identities that are typically associated with poststructural and postmodern thought - identity as fragmentary, contingent, multiple - but at the same time, emergence calls these very categorisations, these conceptual meanings into question. Fragmentation and contingence suggests the rupture of some coherent entity and the disintegration of rigidly maintained categories of identity, but at the same time the terms imply the emergence of commonality, and even unity, at contingent points of recognition. The concept of emergence reflects the interactive nature of identities and processes of identification with the construction of subjectivity. Whereas the construction of identities, however partial and incomplete, might be considered a predominantly conscious activity, it is incessantly inscribed through a subjectivity which is itself processual and only partially conscious. Psychoanalytic theory, and Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular, has installed the notion of subjectivity as self and social relations in formation; the `conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the

individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world' (Weedon:1987:32). Identities, as intimately related to these subjective processes, may nevertheless be differentially identified as

> that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his or her knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, in Skevington & Baker:1989:194).

It is discontinuity, a sense of contradictory desires and motivations both within and between selves and collectivities, that marks identities as structured primarily through **ambivalence**. That is,

> Always constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other... The attempt to expel the other to the other side of the universe... is a different language from the language of, as it were, the Others who are completely different from oneself. This is the other that belongs inside one. This is the other that one can only know from the place from which one stands. This is the self as it is inscribed in the gaze of the Other... This doubleness of discourse, this necessity of the Other to the self, this inscription of identity in the look of the other... (I)dentity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation... It is that which is narrated in one's own self (Hall:1991:48-49).

Fashions, especially as expressive systems of cultural representations, are integral to the contingent foundations of identities. For fashion might also be described as `ambivalent'; that is, it often exists as a contradiction between opposing functions, meanings, symbols and perceptions, which are simultaneously constituted and expressed in complex dynamics at both the individual and the social or cultural levels. Clothing or fashion creates boundaries, both physical, and symbolic or perceptual, between the `self' and that which is not the self. A sense of individuality is fundamentally constructed through fashion as social praxis by the imposition of boundaries dividing the physical, psychological and social conception of self from that which is not the self. Further, a socially conceived notion of what constitutes the `self' and the `other' is conjured through the play, and business, of representation within the system of fashion.

Simultaneously, fashion creates boundaries between different `selves', the various ambivalent and ambiguous aspects of any one individual's social life. To say that clothing only reflects certain social roles however, would be to oversimplify the

relationship clothing has with the people who wear it. There is a tension between the way in which this clothing is worn to functionally express different social roles, and the way in which the individual expresses particular aspects of `self' by combining different aspects of dress. At the same time, the clothing worn may itself create particular perceptions of, and indeed even change, the bodies of those wearing it. In this way, clothing is concurrently both individual and social, the existence of any particular forms of dress creating and transforming each other, and being created and transformed, through both functional and expressive elements in social and individual behaviours and practices. In every case a transmutation occurs through this tension between collective identities and individual identities, and this creation of identities is at the heart of the processes of clothing and fashion.

(2) THEORISING COMPONENTS OF IDENTITY

> Clothes are inevitable. They are nothing less than the furniture of the mind made visible.
>
> James Laver
> *Style in Costume*

The fashions that we wear have no intrinsic meaning in and of themselves; rather, garments become imbued with meaning only within complex processes of social transcription encompassing a myriad of systemic and interrelational social practices. Clothing influences every aspect of our lives in the western world, all the more so because it is grounded in specific sets of social relationships referred to as fashion - a type of clothing embedded in particular economic and cultural relationships.

Because fashion is multi-faceted, it is difficult to conceptualise. Of those works that do constitute a specific analysis of fashion (as opposed to literatures that describe the particularly historical or cultural nature of different forms of dress) most tend to oversimplify fashion's multi-layered dynamics and meanings. While this might be expected given the heuristic nature of social investigation - and the use of pointed

exaggeration as a theoretical tool - many concentrate on only one aspect of fashion's total spectrum, or reduce its very complex interactive process to a singular causal factor.

My intention in this section is to identify and critique some of the central theoretical analyses of fashion in their relationship to identities; and in doing so to suggest that the roles of subjectivities and social identities in creating, changing, and manipulating fashion are misconstrued and marginalised in many instances. This is not to imply that different analytical explanations of fashion are erroneous *per se*; indeed, all of the theoretical approaches elaborated in this chapter have provided insightful, and sometimes invaluable interpretations of different social behaviours and practices encompassed by the world of fashion. My argument is, however, that comparatively few analytical approaches deal explicitly with identities and fashions as interactive processes. When this dynamic influence on fashion is identified in the argument, then it is often incorporated in support of arguments centred elsewhere, or examined in a fairly cursory manner according to questionable assumptions: In both instances, the construction of subjectivity and identity are marginalised to the extent that any exploration of the nature of the social subject with regard to fashion becomes implicit within texts centred elsewhere, and thus loses its central importance. The ultimate objective of the narrative, then, is to place subjectivity and identity in positions of central importance in the theoretical explanation of fashion, at the nexus of tension between the individual and the collective.

THEORISING FASHIONS AND IDENTITIES

As early as 1831, Thomas Carlyle was arguing that `(t)he first purpose of clothes... was not warmth or decency, but Ornament'; that it is the **adornment** of the body that in all evidence appears to be the primary impulse informing the clothing of different cultures and historical periods.

This process of adornment begins not necessarily with clothing or fashion, but with the human body itself. The popular understanding of nakedness is the state of `having the body unclothed; undressed' (Hanks et al.:1988), of being uncovered or unconcealed. It is perhaps more accurate to define `nakedness' as a state of having the body `unadorned': whenever human beings introduce a foreign object in contact with their body, they initiate a modification of their body. In this sense, **every** culture encountered in the world - including every woman, child and man within these societies - is `dressed' in some way; and this process of dressing is necessarily bound up with processes of social and cultural identification.

The act of decoration is one means through which we express the extension of the body as a biological organism, and attempt to transcend the limitations of that same body. Dress is a **particular** form of decoration which `is an extension of the body, yet not quite part of it, (and) not only links that body to the social world, but also more clearly separates the two' (Wilson:1985:8). Human beings are, unquestionably, embodied, the human body being constituted through a complex dynamic of biological, psychological, and social factors which simultaneously inform and transform each other. It is at specific points in this ongoing interchange that human identities are established and fluctuate, and cultural phenomena such as dress are created and transmuted. Clothing is inscribed upon a biological organism, but that biological organism may already be considered social by virtue of dominant cultural perceptions which influence the way we perceive the body, its functions and parameters, among them the appropriate clothing to adorn it with. Clothing therefore simultaneously arises from, and influences, the formation of a human being as a culturally embodied individual, and individual capable of - and constituted by - identification, which is simultaneously subject to the dominant social values and practices surrounding the body and its adornment. Each body changes the form of the ornamentation it wears, as well as influencing the social perception of how the body is constituted. The history of the western nude demonstrates the way in which the representation of the body in art conforms more closely to the social ideal of the body as influenced by the period costume it wore, rather than the physical idiosyncrasies of the individual being represented:

> (c)hanges in fashion alter the look of clothes, but the look of the body has to change with it. An image of the nude body that is absolutely free of counterimage of clothing is virtually impossible. Thus all nudes in art since modern fashion began are wearing the ghosts of absent clothes - sometimes highly visible ghosts (Hollander:1978:85-86).

Dress, in its intimate and highly personal relationship with the human body in adornment, supports the notion that both fashion and identity are somehow exclusively associated with the individual. Clothing as ornamentation may indeed be considered at an individual level wherein decorative dress may be used reflexively. Early anthropologists were quick to point out, however, that an appreciation of aesthetic beauty and the expression of idiosyncratic qualities is not created or assumed by an individual, but is instead learned through the whole process of socialisation into a community. Personal expression, in both conformity and differentiation, is dependent upon the social groups to which the individual belongs. Any individual expression in decoration is largely constituted through the social relationships within which it takes place, relations which distinguish different social roles and behaviours, and indicate differential social power. Simultaneously then,

> (c)lothing is one of the most personal components of daily life, and at the same time it is an expression of social activities deeply embedded in the cultural patterns of an era (Roach & Eicher:1979:418).

The concept of `fashion' indicates a particular **commodified** form of clothing in which the key feature is the rapid and incessant change of style. Fashion first appeared tentatively in the west during the fourteenth century alongside the rise of mercantile capitalism in the medieval centres of Europe; a new level of consumption was signalled when the upper classes began to discard clothing before they were outworn (Laver:1982:62). The same social upheavals that conceived the social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, added to the variety and acceleration of fashion. Industrialisation and mass production, urbanisation, and massive transformations in systems of political and social power impacted not only upon specific phenomena in the social order, but also upon the very way in which that social order was conceptualised. The theoretical literature emerging in the social sciences has progressively developed a threefold intention: firstly, to examine the way in which fashion has developed in the new social order; secondly, to understand the

relationship between fashion and its social, economic and political context; and thirdly, to explain the way in which individuals in specific social and political relationships interact through fashion, with each other, in particular ways. In general terms, two distinct traditions of thought emerged: those concerned with monitoring change in the **form** of fashion and suggesting explanations for its dynamic process, and those concerned with establishing the motivations for individuals to adopt or consume new fashions (Crane:1990:2-3). As this thesis focusses on the formation of subjective identity and the formation of a sense of self in fashion, the ensuing argument deals primarily with the latter (although it should be noted that many productive connections might emerge from a reconsideration of the former[1] in light of the proliferation and acceleration of style in the past two decades). No matter what the analytical focus however, all of the orientations involve a particular perception of subjectivity and identity in their own approach, which has important implications for the facility of their analysis in explaining both fashion as a cultural practice, and the ways in which social subjectivity is processed at a more general level.

One persistent problem throughout the theoretical literature is the difficulty in explaining the apparent **irrationality** of fashion. Many writers have reasoned that

> the word `fashion', because it implies change and mutability, suggests something frivolous and inconsiderable... Because it is continually changing its laws, we are able to perceive something of their monstrous absurdity, but we are not for that reason better able to defy them. The absurdity of fashion serves only to make its enactments more patently cruel and more obviously irrational (Bell:1976:50).

Arguments in the fashion literature have often tended towards a functional rationalisation of fashion extremes consistent with this view. Whereas biblical explanations of clothing had historically defined dress as functional in preserving modesty and reminding humanity of its sin, other arguments from a more scientific perspective tended towards clothing being explained as functional of biological human `needs'. Unlike other fluctuating art forms, clothing is directly related to the human body, and thus the first functional explanations centred around biological protection. Even when accumulating anthropological evidence suggested that `needs' varied across time and culture, theorists continued to look elsewhere, that is, to explain fashion in terms of something **outside** itself, in order to account for the way in which

`rational' individuals make themselves uncomfortable, even cause themselves pain, in order to dress fashionably.

FASHION AS FUNCTIONALLY IRRATIONAL

Theorists of fashion in sociological circles continue to be reluctant to discard the notion of fashion as being a functional expression of external phenomena. Fashion's early connection with the rise of mercantile trade, and the development of an industrialised production system, has identified the growth of bourgeois capital as an important variable in the way that fashion has historically developed. Consideration of these factors has prompted sociological theorists of political economy to pin-point **capitalism** as the rational economic cause of fashion's irrational social cycles, and identity as primarily constituted through economic dynamics of class and class consciousness. Their arguments, which might loosely be described as structural, may be categorised as *objective* in so far as they stem from a model of scientific rationality.

Economic Arguments

At the most economistic level, theories of the relationship between fashion and capitalism have reasoned that the function of fashion originates in the perpetual need for capital to expand, encouraging the consumption of commodities in the social world. Fashion, as a commodity, will thus dictate the form of the clothing individuals may wear at any one time, given the `need' for human beings to wear clothes for reasons of protection and/or modesty. Explanations employing this line of argument - in `ideal typical' terms - assume a simple model of economic base and cultural superstructural relationships, in which individuals suffer from a `false consciousness' of their position in the social order. They also assume therefore, that individuals blindly follow the changes in fashion which are, quite literally, decreed by the capitalist order. People, and especially women - for whom fashion is a singular preoccupation - unknowingly participate in a conspiratorial strategy to consume far

more than they need, thus bolstering the system of capital growth.

Elements of this argument are, no doubt, important. The development of capitalism, especially in the industrial era, was instrumental in shifting the impetus of fashion to that of a commodity, and the continued growth of capitalism has meant expansion in commodified cultural forms. In returning to the notion of `need' however, and implying that human beings `need' some types of clothing (but do not actually need those that capitalism determines or constructs), these arguments collapse into biologism. They assume that human beings have constant, unchanging and definitive needs, but any attempts to define these needs prove impossible given variation across human societies. Ultimately, anthropological evidence indicates that even biological requirements for warmth or nourishment are socially defined, and constructed differentially across cultures (Wilson:1985:50).

Class Identity

Theorists of class dynamics in fashion were among the first to recognise the importance of identities in the cultural mores of normative social groupings, and the ways in which social differentiation and identification was enacted and maintained through material and ideological mechanisms. Theorists of class attempt to explain fashion's relationship to identity not in terms of the capitalist economic process as such, but rather as a function of the struggle for class status in capitalist societies. Historical arguments have long recognised the role of clothing and fashion in preserving status hierarchies within specific periods of western culture. Sumptuary laws, for example, have been extensively documented as one instance of the enactment of civil law by social elites to preserve the social worth of particular adornments, and limit their use to elite social classes or castes (Roach & Eicher:1979).

The boundaries of identity in contemporary capitalist society are perhaps inevitably, and some would argue exclusively, class-based. The dissolution of the feudal social order, and the rise of the bourgeois classes in growing urban centres initiated the

concept of social status as reliant on individual work and merit, rather than birth. Individuals were therefore free to imitate those of higher social classes through their possession of economic wealth, but as soon as fashions diffused into the bourgeois (and lower) classes, it became intolerable to the aristocracy who shifted the focus of fashion to something new, which was similarly copied; the whole process adding to the constant cycle and acceleration of fashion.

One of the earliest theoretical works in this tradition that continues to be influential is Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Veblen's exposition argues that class identity, based primarily (although not singularly) on fashion as a product of industrial capitalism, is one expression of the bourgeois premise and practice of `conspicuous consumption'. According to Veblen, the consumer society of modern capitalism encourages the acquisition of commodities, these possessions signalling a wealth which had become `intrinsically honourable', conferring more social status than either talent or lineage. Conspicuous wealth, conspicuous waste, and conspicuous leisure were the hallmarks of this new class order, fashion being one recurring expression of these social dynamics:

> (O)ur apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance... It is true of dress in even a higher degree than of most other items of consumption, that people will undergo a very considerable degree of privation in the comforts or the necessaries of life in order to afford what is considered a decent amount of wasteful consumption... It is not only that one must be guided by the code of proprieties in dress... but besides that, the requirement of expensiveness is so ingrained into our habits of thought in matters of dress that any other than expensive apparel is instinctively odious to us... If, in addition to showing that the wearer can afford to consume freely and uneconomically, it can also be shown in the same stroke that he or she is not under the necessity of earning a livelihood, the evidence of social worth is enhanced in a very considerable degree (1899:167-169).

Veblen argued that the precepts of the law of conspicuous waste were the determining factor in the changes of the fashion cycle. As a corollary of waste, the aspiration to perpetual novelty dictates the unequivocal abandonment of all that is considered `old' in favour of the fashion of the latest season, thus significantly increasing the possibilities for wasteful consumption. In Veblen's analysis, this was especially true of bourgeois women who were, as reminiscent of Engels' argument, the property of their husbands:

> (It) has in the course of economic development become the office of the woman to consume vicariously for the head of the household; and her apparel is contrived with this object in view. It has come about that obviously productive labour is in a peculiar degree derogatory to respectable women, and therefore special pains should be taken in the construction of women's dress, to impress upon the beholder the fact (often indeed a fiction) that the wearer does not and can not habitually engage in useful work...By virtue of its descent from a patriarchal past, our social system makes it the woman's function in an especial degree to put in evidence her household's ability to pay... (T)he high heel, the skirt, the impracticable bonnet, the corset, and the general disregard of the wearer's comfort which is an obvious feature of all civilised women's apparel, are so many items of evidence to the effect that in the modern civilised scheme of life the woman is still, in theory, the economic dependent of the man, - that, perhaps in a highly idealised sense, she still is the man's chattel (1899:179-180).

Women therefore consume apparel in order to maximise the waste involved in expense, in display of leisure, and in the cyclical abandonment of fashions which demonstrate the highest status possible for their husbands and their households - thus maintaining their class identity as those with conspicuous status and wealth. At the same time however, Veblen argued that people in general, and women in particular, were unconsciously cognisant of a universal standard of `beauty' to which fashion is abhorrent: `native taste' is determined by a `psychological law' in which humans `abhor futility', and extremes of fashion are, in Veblen's argument, obviously futile. Thus, changes in fashion are motivated by a constant urge to escape the tyranny of irrational and ugly fashions - which society *instinctively* recognises as ugly - and attain a standard of natural beauty. It is at this point that Veblen's analysis moves away from being a critique of capitalist oppression in general, and becomes instead a scientific utilitarian criticism of particular cultural artefacts. Veblen's argument in itself cannot universally define particular standards of relative beauty or ugliness. In the last instance, Veblen is disposed to argue from a utilitarian perspective steeped in the scientific rationality of the nineteenth century, which defines value only in terms of its productive economic use in western societies.

The analysis of fashion as an element of status in capitalist societies is an important consideration, especially in its historical development alongside the growth of wealth and consumption in Europe. The continuing importance of class analysis is evidenced by exhaustive arguments relating the contemporary dynamics of class inclusion and exclusion by means of fashion and style: Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), which identifies fashion and style more generally as important sources of `cultural capital',

being an exemplary text. However, Veblen's concept of fashion as an expression of class differentiation requires interrogation given the increasingly complex class dynamics of contemporary society. At the time of Veblen's writing, a very different theorist, Georg Simmel, also generally concurred with the idea that class is a basic element of fashion change. Since 1904 however, the ontological and epistemological definition of class has become infinitely more intricate (Blumer:1969). Does an exclusive class analysis not seriously inhibit the consideration of social processes other than class - differential junctures of `codification' and identification across boundaries of gender, age or politics, for example - which have become far more prevalent across contemporary western societies (Crane:1990)? Veblen acknowledges the gender divisions of a patriarchal society cursorily, but little extensive consideration is given to the means by which processes of gender interact with those of class; class is determining in the last instance. The analysis of class prestige encounters further difficulties when faced with the question of the particular *forms* that fashion takes in different historical periods, or how the component elements of fashion forms change in particular ways across various historical and social contexts. When the imperative of inquiry is class status to the exclusion of other means of differentiation and identification, sartorial subversions of class norms and values on the part of individuals ostensibly structured through class forces become unintelligible. Again, social subjects are presented as the victims of a type of false consciousness - casualties of the law of conspicuous consumption which determines their every action in sartorial expression. If social identity is constructed through irrational practices of wasteful sartorial consumption, and that consumption is antithetical to a natural or universal `good taste', then all types of cultural activity which might be considered pleasurable are implicated as futile and abhorrent. Veblen's argument displays a well established `philosophic fear of fashion' (Hanson:1990), and constructs a rational world of utility where the `irrational' has no place, and the subjective pleasure of individuals in sartorial expression (the ways in which social subjects are not only created by but also create fashion and find pleasure in its ephemeral expression) is rejected as unrelated to scientific progress.

The Theory of the Leisure Class was initially published in 1899, and thus cannot

account for developments in the wider democratisation of fashion throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. It employs what has come to be known as a `trickle-down' theory of fashion; and while it certainly remains true that those of higher classes may set some fashions, certain trends might also be considered to trickle sideways, or even upwards - such as the street and salvage fashions of the 1980's for example. Veblen's analysis is appropriate to quote at length however, as the precepts of his arguments are frequently utilised by more recent theorists in their analysis of contemporary fashions. Quentin Bell for example, as recently as 1976, has - albeit with several qualifications and minor modifications - presented Veblen's argument as a thesis appropriate in explaining fashions in the modern age. Bell (1976:21) maintains that `(c)lothes hurt us in a pecuniary, a physical, an aesthetic and frequently a moral sense; they are (very often) expensive, unhealthy, ugly and immodest'.: and although Bell revises Veblen's argument slightly at several points - most notably in his explanation of women's clothing and the forms that fashion takes across time - the argument, like Veblen's, ultimately founders in its pure utilitarianism and exclusive class basis.

Identity and the Mass Market

Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen (1982) directly base many of their theoretical premises on those of Veblen, arguing that the same dynamics of conspicuous consumption and waste that existed in Veblen's world continue in the present regime of capital; but with one major difference. Not only does consumption continue to construct our subjective experience of fashion, but the forces of consumption and vicarious waste have been exacerbated by the mass imagery of advertising. As the argument goes, the fashion cycle was initially an expression of the values and tastes of the wealthy classes whose levels of consumption indicated their social status. With the onset of mass production, the potential for mass consumption signalled a greater freedom and democratisation of fashion for the lower classes in society - but this democratisation ultimately served to reinforce differences in social power as `freedom and equality could be translated into the ability of each person to emulate or to aspire to emulate

the tastes of the upper classes' (Nystrom, in Ewen:1976). The freedom of fashion in the realms of mass production and consumption was further grounded in uniformity; `(t)he success of the industry was in its capacity to produce and distribute standardized goods laced with the lingo of individual choice and self-expression... which robbed it of its meaning' (Ewen & Ewen:1982:226). The democracy of image is therefore itself and ethereal image, and none can escape the compulsive forces of the market, and of marketing.

The `co-optation' of social subjectivities and the market driven manipulation of identities (in an object oriented culture) is well documented in sociological and feminist literature (see, for example, Barthes:1967, Baudrillard:1979, Bowlby:1985, Carter:1982, Coward:1985, Haug:1983, McCraken:1990, Tomlinson:1990, Williamson:1986). The Ewens' argument is more complex than that of Veblen, and includes extensive discussion of the way in which multiple identities emerge at the junctures of material consumption, symbolic/ideological meaning in cultural representation and social dynamics of power; not only across class boundaries, but also around several others such as age, ethnicity, gender or politics. Ultimately however, our clothing constructs our appearance, and the market constructs our identities through fashion. Thus,

> today's fashions offer the weapons of resistance and compliance in one, ready to wear. Image and information, recast and readapted to the machinery of fashion marketing, to the politics of culture, assert a revolt once again. A multiplicity of imagery abounds; meaning is lost...In fashion, as in much of the imagery of a mass culture, we confront the echoes of our own desires. The history of mass fashion is one of a powerful conjuration, implanting the idiom of people's longings upon the outer textures of corporate enterprise; beneath the surface lies a continuity of frustration, a squelching of initiative (1982:250-251).

There is no longer any life beyond the market, outside the market; but if it is not possible to reside in an external position to the market, then how is the market to be challenged? It seems as much of an essentialism to posit identities as simplistically and passively structured/inscribed by market forces, as to argue for the coherent and rational self-directive subject of the enlightenment. How do social subjects subvert the material mechanisms and meanings of the market in the shifting process of identity formation?, a reactive/reflexive rather than passive process?

While having a slightly different focus, Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) attributes a similar power to the market and advertising in identity process and formation. Lasch argues that the consciousness of western culture has moved away from the socio-political movements of the 1960's, and has instead, through the power of the media in a `social invasion of the self', come to be obsessed with personal and individual growth in a `therapeutic sensibility'. According to Lasch, the image propaganda of commodities conditions individuals to consume - rather than protest - as a form of therapy for the `banality of everyday existence'; which is indeed created by uniform consumption in the first instance.

While both of these arguments differ in their premises, their conclusions are similar: The market structures our subjective experience of culture, and in so doing condemns us to uniformity and futility. The social subject thus becomes constructed by the market, an agent of the market, possessing no powers of discrimination or control. Every aspect of culture fashions individual identity through the rapacious and destructive mechanisms of market merchandising, and consumerism becomes a compulsive behaviour which conditions individuals in an erroneous concept of their own social position.

> The self-consciousness that mocks all attempts at spontaneous action or enjoyment derives in the last analysis from the waning belief in the reality of the external world...To the performing self, the only reality is the identity he (sic) can construct out of materials furnished by advertising and mass culture, themes of popular film and fiction, and fragments torn from a vast range of cultural traditions, all of them equally contemporaneous to the contemporary mind... (T)he new Narcissus gazes at his own reflection, not so much in admiration as in unremitting search of flaws, signs of fatigue, decay... Life becomes a work of art... (1982:91).

This characterisation of social identification through mechanisms of `mass culture' is reminiscent of the Frankfurt school approach, a theoretical tradition which made significant contributions to an understanding of the dynamics of mass or popular culture, and the role of mass media in influencing individual consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer in particular, throughout *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), painted a picture of popular cultural forms as the ideological expression of standardised monopoly capitalism. Within the productive and consumptive industry

of cultural commodities, the individual is an `illusion' not only because of standardisation, but also because individuality in itself is accepted as generality.

> Pseudo-individuality is rife... What is individual is no more than the generality's power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such... (T)he peculiarity of the self is a monopoly commodity determined by society; it is falsely represented as natural (1944:154).

The Frankfurt School arguments were considerably influenced by social events (and personal experiences) during the era of Nazi Germany, and it is thus unsuprising that their critiques of culture were centred in a nightmare mass society of propaganda and uniformity. Echoes of this disposition can also be heard in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), which argues that rational and technological society effectively contains any social change, `qualitative change which would establish essentially different institutions, a new direction of the productive process, new modes of human existence' (1964:11). Simultaneously though, Marcuse argues that purportedly `irrational' aspects of culture such as fashion contain the means through which the industrial order might be subverted. This is because

> (t)he advancing one dimensional society alters the relation between the rational and the irrational. Contrasted with the fantastic and insane aspects of its rationality, the realm of the irrational becomes the home of the really rational - of the ideas which may promote the `art of life' (1964:194).

The arguments of Adorno and Horkheimer however, like those of Veblen, remain rooted in a primarily functional and rationalist analysis of cultural forms. While it is important to recognise the interrelationship of fashion and capitalism in the interdependence of their development, the argument grants no role to the contradiction and ambivalence which is intrinsic to fashion. The analysis is over-deterministic in the sense that it does not allow for the creative, purposive and pleasurable aspects of fashion which allow individuals to undermine market mechanisms in the self-construction of identity. The huge range of subcultural and politico-oppositional movements which utilise fashion in the re-constitution of identity as conscious narrative, tend to call into question many premises of the `market co-optative' arguments; even if the fashion establishment attempts to co-opt subculture. While the radical critiques of Lasch, and Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, are far more sophisticated

in their analysis of contributory variables in the creation of social subjects, their argument ultimately gives no place to a self-definition which is intrinsic in creating the component boundaries of subjective identity. Some theorists have attempted to define fashion as `language' originating in the unconscious (Lurie:1981), or conducted intricate and exhaustive semiotic analyses of fashion as structural linguistic/textual systems (Barthes:1967/1985). Meaning is an integral component of representational differentiation processes, but is not something that is singular, monolithic or universally imposed - as tends to be suggested by market related analyses. Meaning rather exists as sets of definitional and textual alternatives grounded in normative discourses. Therefore, while the influence of advertising imagery and its normative meanings might be widespread, it is nevertheless possible for the social subject to subvert and reconstruct meaning in the creation of their own identities.

Identity as Structural

What these arguments largely have in common is that all primarily refer to fashion as a function of structural social relationships, or as a structural system in and of itself, which has (albeit variously) little relation to other systems of social power. All are primarily macro-sociological explanations of fashion, which only focus on one particular aspect of the fashion process. Thus, while all have empirical validity to different extents, the nature of the analytic focus precludes a comprehensive explanation of the dynamics of fashion. While Veblen and the critics of mass culture have drawn attention to the importance of the economic aspect of fashion as a commodity and the centrality of fashion and style in class consciousness, they have been unable to account for the way in which consumers, as constructed but nevertheless active social subjects, interact with the clothing that they wear. These arguments thus have difficulty identifying the way in which the form of fashion, and concomitantly the boundaries of different social groups, may change.

FASHION AS INTRINSICALLY IRRATIONAL

I want to suggest that the `irrationality' of fashion is primarily an expression of the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in the phenomenon as an intimate cultural site of identity processes. I think there is a theoretical problem in the extent to which `irrationality' is generally conceived as separate, distinct from and in opposition to the apparent `rationality' of other life experience (as Marcuse would suggest). If fashion is explained as the purely functional expression of dynamics centred in other more `rational' social phenomena such as economic, class or market foundations, then necessary elements of identity formation are marginalised. I argued earlier that identity emerges at specific points throughout the interaction of material and ideological elements of discursive practices. Representation and differentiation, the linguistic, artistic and cultural impositions of meaning, are constitutive elements of subjective process. If ambiguity and ambivalence are components of these theoretical texts, ever present in the attempt at definition, then the duplicity and fluidity of meanings defies the categorisation of identities as constructed through any one social practice in its entirety. In this sense, identities must always be irrational in that they defy coherent or unified practice.

It is possible to characterise arguments which posit singular foundations (that is, one monolithic philosophical premise on which arguments are based) as `univocal', steeped in a non-recognition of both experiential and theoretical ambiguity and ambivalence. I will argue later that the delineation of concepts as fixed, stable and definitive is misleading, as the source of definition, even in this univocal mode, is grounded in ambiguity. It is easier in some sense to stress complexity than to articulate a definitive statement regarding any particular social phenomenon; and the more macrosociological arguments outlined above are concise and often brilliantly perceptive in their elaboration of particular aspects of fashion's dynamics. Nevertheless, certain other traditions of thought within the social sciences, particularly in the study of fashion, take as their explicit basis the contingent ambiguities of the self and identities. These analytical threads also posit foundations; but while foundations are a requisite of philosophical articulation, theorists vary in the

foundational weight they bring to bear on different concepts. Many of the following theories, drawn from the history of fashion literature and microsociological or psychological/psychoanalytic in orientation, begin to draw out the ambiguity and ambivalence at the heart of the relationship between fashions and identities. In my view, these analytics contribute strongly - in the explanation of particular aspects, but more importantly in the general form of enquiry - to the conceptualisation of identities as emergent in relation to fashions.

Fashion and Ambivalent Sexualities

Sigmund Freud, the original author of the psychoanalytic theory which challenged the notion of the unified subject, commented on the sexually symbolic role of many different articles of clothing. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), Freud argued that items such as the coat, the necktie, and the hat might symbolise the phallus, while fur could symbolise pubic hair, silk might be interpreted as symbolic of the skin, and underclothes the act of undressing.

In Freud's wake, J.C. Flugel (1930) was one of the first theorists of a psychoanalytic orientation to produce a comprehensive theory of fashion and sexuality. According to Flugel, it is not only the case that certain items of clothing might symbolise different elements of sex and sexuality, but that clothing as a practice in **general** is symbolically sexual. In Flugel's argument, the greatest tension in sartorial expression is the contradictory impulses towards `modesty' on the one hand, and erotic `self-display' on the other. Originally, the unconscious desire to engage in exhibitionism, and the reaction-formation against this impulse in the form of modesty, were associated with the naked body. This conflict has been unconsciously displaced into clothing, which functions as a compromise because clothing both covers, but at the same time attracts attention to, the physical body. Flugel was one of the first social scientific theorists to identify fashion in its relationship with the human self as **ambivalent**. On the one hand, the wearing of clothes ostensibly covers the body for the sake of modesty in a `civilised' society. On the other hand, clothing

simultaneously provides a means to gratify exhibitionist tendencies by also displaying the body; overt sexuality is repressed, but sexuality is simultaneously expressed in oblique ways to arouse far less modesty-invoked anxiety. Fashion cycles are created through the ongoing tension between these two dynamics, and this contradiction can be considered the origin of the shifting erogenous zone (the exposing of different parts of women's bodies to provide novel sexual attractions for men) in Laver's (1969) work. Furthermore, the ambivalence of general opinion on fashion - strong feelings both for and against a particular fashion within the general public - must therefore actually originate in ambivalent feelings towards sexuality.

Flugel's argument maintains that fashion is simultaneously erotic and modest because of the differentiation in forms of clothing between the sexes. Flugel adhered to the `Great Masculine Renunciation' theory, and thus could argue that women's clothing is both more modest and more erotic than that of men. According to Flugel, this might be explained by the `fact' that while phallic symbolism in clothing provides motives for display, uterine or vaginal symbolism forms the unconscious motivation for modesty. In two related arguments, he further asserts the heightened eroticism of women's clothing. Women are both more narcissistic than men, forming a desire to be `looked at' in a passively exhibitionistic way, and also possess a more diffused eroticism. Due to the `castration complex', women's libidos are not concentrated in the genitals, and they therefore display their libido through other parts of their bodies.

In Flugel's theory, fashion is exclusively feminine, and wholly irrational. Valerie Steele (1985:29-30) maintains that Flugel's argument is permeated with his dislike for fashion which adversely affects his analysis and application of complex psychological conditions such as narcissism. Flugel further exhibits a somewhat patronising attitude towards women. He argues that women are psychologically immature, their narcissism equating to a vanity which fosters sexual jealousy, competition and social envy. Women are neurotic in this sense, and the engagement with fashion is therefore a neurotic symptom. Unlike men, who have developed beyond these moral and psychological flaws in their renunciation of fashion, women remain sartorially underdeveloped. Full development occurs, of course, when women give up all that

is `unnatural' - and therefore ugly and absurd - in fashion, and embrace a type of garment more natural and conforming more closely to our biological constitution:

> (I)t is not possible for us to change our bodies by the mere process of changing their outer covers. Our bodies, with all their imperfections, persist underneath; and since they constitute a more essential, permanent and inescapable element of our being than do our clothes, the reality principle demands that we should make our peace with them, and live with them on terms, if not of affection, at least of toleration (Flugel:1930:222-223).

Like Veblen, Flugel's characterisation of fashion rests on the premise that there is a `natural' state outside the realms of artificially imposed fashion to which human beings can aspire, and is therefore subject to a critique grounded in the false dichotomisation of `nature' and `culture', and the non-recognition of variable biological requirements across cultures.

The thesis that individuals are constituted through contradictory and ambivalent psychological and social forces nevertheless remains an important aspect of Flugel's argument. However, not all psychoanalysts recognised the inherent ambivalence of fashion and its concomitant ambiguity in self-formative processes. Edmund Bergler, a psychoanalyst of the 1950's, also took fashion to be a gross perversion, but for quite different reasons than those of Flugel. According to Bergler, fashion is both related to eroticism, but also intrinsically ugly, as fashion is in fact an enormous hoax, `perpetrated on Women by the unconscious of some designers' (1953:3). He argued that the world of fashion design was not the work of women, but rather populated primarily by men; and he thereafter made the somewhat crude assumption that most of these men were in fact homosexual. In the 1920's, the era of the flapper styles, these homosexual designers had attempted to fulfil their repressed fantasies and turn women into boys. Having inevitably failed in this endeavour, as the century progressed, their subliminal hatred of women came to the fore and they attempted to force women into ever more hideous and uncomfortable styles of clothing.

According to Bergler, this situation is symptomatic of the general malaise in twentieth century sexuality. Men of the contemporary world were fixated with infantile attachment to the mother. The adult `infant' could therefore only become sexually aroused by a juvenile `peeping' activity, which the fetishistic semi-concealing

artificiality of fashion encouraged.

> (C)lothing reflects a peculiar distortion of sex based on a progressive, psychologically conditioned, diminuation of the biological drive proper... (W)oman's clothes are aphrodisiacs for man's vanishing potency. In childhood, sex was *the* forbidden; Feminine clothes...make it the forbidden once more. In short, feminine clothes serve as a convenient proof of hypersexuality, even to the impotent man (1953:289-295).

Again in Bergler's view, humanity could find its essential essence, its true and good form, if it abandoned all pretences to civilisation, especially fashion, and returned to its `natural' biological state.

Yet humanity is inextricably beyond the point where a return to some kind of biologically regulated instinctual state is possible, even were it desirable. Humanity has replaced a biologically controlled cyclical pattern of mating according to female receptivity, with a complex system of socially defined sexual signals and behaviours which indicate different sexual identities, preferences and practices. Furthermore, the boundaries between what is `natural' or `artificial' are not as simple or straightforward as they appear. It is certainly arguable that the way in which the `natural' is conceptualised in this mode of social scientific thought is produced by the imposition of dichotomous categories of order which do not in fact exist in a chaotic empirical world. `Nature' and `artifice' are not discrete and oppositional classifications which may be treated as separate entities, but rather related process of creation and identification which might diverge or conflate in different historical and cultural situations.

One specifically sexual situation in which the natural and the artificial converge in an intimate relationship with fashion, is the practice of fetishism - a concept which when associated with clothing refers to the obsession with, and manipulation of, objects of attire which replace a person in the process of sexual gratification. In fetishism an individual actively seeks, and even depends upon, an artificial object for sexual arousal (which has very little to do with `natural' or biological reproduction) - and because fashion is intimately associated with the human body it provides fetishists with a specifically associative focus.

Of all the myriad psychological functions and fantasies that fashion fulfils, psychologists and psychoanalysts have concentrated on fetishism to an inordinate degree. Psychoanalytic theorists have advanced several explanations of the origin and practice of fetishism, which attempt to establish the relative similarity or distinction between fetishism on the one hand, and the erotic nature of clothing and fashion in general, on the other. Von Kraft-Ebing (1965), Havelock Ellis (1901), and Freud (1905) have all differentially defined the relationship between fashion and fetishism; being ambiguous enough in their differentiation of `normal' fetishism (ubiquitous in fashion) and `pathological' fetishism (a psychological `disorder') to produce a number of alternative readings of the ultimate relationship between the two states. James Laver, for example, has commented that `Fashion is the comparative of which Fetishism is the superlative' (1969:119); implying that fetishism is a general characteristic of contemporary fashion, rather than an individual psychological constitution. According to Laver, fashion appeals to `normal' erotic appetites as well as those of fetishists, because the ongoing cycles of fashion reflect shifting cultural obsessions with different parts of the female anatomy. To draw comparisons between fetishism and a wider erotic appeal however, is to conflate a distinction between the motivation for erotic adornment which fashion utilises, and the unconscious drives and desires that arise out of specific personal experiences between an individual's relationships with both other people, and associative objects. Furthermore, the argument cannot define the position of women. What is the erotic appeal *for women* in the wearing of clothing - such as lingerie or corsets - that men often define as fetishes?

In *Fashion and Fetishism* (1982), David Kunzle focuses on corsetry and tightlacing as forms of female fetishism. Kunzle defines fetishism as `the individual displacement of private erotic feeling... (which) serves to express a special socio-sexual attitude or relationship within the normal functioning of fashion' (1982:1). Fashion and fetishism cannot be conflated, but there are connections between these distinct forms of behaviours, especially with regard to western forms of body sculpture. Whereas many debilitating or crippling forms of body sculpture have been characterised as expressive of men's dominance over women, Kunzle argues that the high heel, corsetry,

tightlacing and collars all provide tactile, symbolic and psychosexual stimulation and pleasure for the person wearing these articles of clothing, as much as for an external sexual subject who might be observing. Tightlacing at least was one form of fetishism which expressed women's agency against a cult of motherhood, women's possession and articulation of their own erotic desires, and women's self-control and autonomy in the face of economic and psychological dependence. Fetishism in fashion according to Kunzle, is therefore liberating in both a physical and psychological sense: his work is a defence of fetishism as a somewhat unorthodox, but nevertheless valid and autonomous form of sexual expression which is reflected in certain forms of fashion.

Valerie Steele has pointed out the difficulty in applying this approach to the analysis of either fetishism as such, or erotic fashion more generally. She argues that *none* of the accounts which characterise fashion as more or less fetishistic are adequate in providing an analysis of fashion as erotic:

> (T)he fashion historian should distinguish between (fetishism) on the one hand, and a more widespread erotic symbolism on the other... Erotic symbolism may well extend beyond fetishism, in ways that would appeal to both men and women... It might be more productive for the fashion historian to explore these, rather than to rely so heavily on `fetishism' as an explanation for sartorial eroticism (1985:33-34).

Steele's alternative to accounts which centre solely on the application of Fetishism to contemporary fashions, is a wider explanation of fashion which focuses on the notions of `Sexual Beauty and the Ideal Self'.

According to Steele, the notion of beauty in any particular historical epoch is a socio-cultural construction; but a construction which nevertheless arises indirectly from the desire for sexual stimulation. The primary centre for sexual stimulation - the genital region - is not generally utilised by fashion for the purpose of sexual enticement (although notable exceptions such as the codpiece have historically occurred). This is due to the progressive repression of mysticism and its associated sexuality throughout western history. Individual psychological development in the contemporary era is therefore constituted through an inhibited sexual perception of the genitals as shameful rather than beautiful. In Steele's argument, this produces a subliminal or diffused eroticism in beauty which centres on secondary sexual

characteristics.

> Although it seems clear that the cultural conception of beauty contains a very significant sexual element, beauty is not reducible to sexual attraction... (F)or both sexes, beauty incorporates, but goes beyond, physical attractions and sexual stimulation... Beauty is eroticism deflected from the goal of immediate sexual pleasure (1985:41).

Reductionist arguments which conflate the ideas of sexual stimulation and beauty therefore oversimplify the role of eroticism as related to clothing and fashion. As Rene Konig observes, `the play of eroticism in fashion' often produces `the displacement and diversion of the erotic effect to dimensions that are not primarily sexual' (1973:82-83). Concealment is as much an erotic experience as display in this case, because it incites curiosity and accesses the `libido for looking' at the heart of an individual's sexual psyche. The clothing of the Victorian era which is usually characterised as overmodest and repressive, therefore becomes as erotic as the novel display of legs in the 1920's because of this deep-seated inquisitiveness.

The changes of fashion then, serve to lend a novel erotic charge to the wearer; and this not only fulfils a culture's ideas of sexual beauty, but also serves as a medium through which the wearer makes statements about their various social identities. In each case, this occurs as a conscious or unconscious expression of the self which mediates between an individual's perception of their own body and social position, and that of an ideal - the `best' self, or the self that an individual might desire to become (within the limits of resources and range of temporal and corporeal possibilities).

> (O)ur appearance is a form of self-presentation, a look that has meaning, involving a compromise between who we are and who we would like to be, our personal self image and a `self-for-others' (Steele:1985:46).

This vacillation which is contextualised within the evolution of cultural ideals of beauty, are interactive with `other social ideals and aesthetic tastes', among them `conceptions of appropriate gender-linked behaviour...the role of women and the position of the young, as well as aesthetic tastes in the fine and decorative arts...' (1985:46).

While Steele begins to traverse the field between the psycho-sexual and socio-political dimensions of our identities, she stops short of providing a socially focused analysis of the relationship between fashion, the unconscious and identities. In Steele's argument, sexuality is primarily an individual phenomena. Furthermore, fashion is ultimately a functional expression of unconscious motivations; which precludes the interaction of the conscious and the unconscious in identities. Although Steele does not simply identify sexuality with sex - as Flugel and Bergler's analyses tend to do - her discussion of the social aspects of sexuality merely provide a contextualisation, rather than an interactive focus, for her theory. There are many aspects of the construction of sexuality in our society which are absent from Steele's analysis. Jeffrey Weeks (1985), for example, maintains that

> The history of sexuality is a complex one; its propelling forces cannot be reduced to the effects of a single set of relations. Sexuality as a contemporary phenomenon is the product of a host of autonomous and interacting traditions and social practices: religious, moral, economic, familial, medical, juridical. Capitalist social relations do certainly set limits and pressures on sexual relations as on everything else... The exact nature of the relationship - the complex mediations, the partial and ever-changing articulations, the proliferation of social interventions and the intricate forms of resistance - needs to be understood through concrete historical investigations... (1985:6-7).

In particular, Steele makes no significant analysis of the interactive nature of gender and sexuality. She tends to define these phenomena as wholly separate entities, and while they may certainly not be treated as identical, her argument concerning the complex relationships between the constituting elements of these social forms marginalises the role of gendered identities in the construction of sexuality. The `ideal self' of Steele's analysis is **itself** formed through the transaction of these phenomena, as well as those others identified by Weeks. In Steele's argument, the self - although comprising both the conscious and the unconscious - has ultimately separate powers of discrimination and determination; a position which tends to deny the influence of a whole range of social forces in the very construction of unconscious and conscious subjectivities. Neither sexuality nor gender are anywhere contextualised within the realm of contemporary capital relations (or for that matter a host of other social dynamics such as ethnicity, age or politics), which are essential ingredients when we consider the import of production and marketing processes as integral to the acceptance of fashion as an erotic medium.

Georg Simmel, whom I will consider further in the context of modernity, was one specifically social theorist who proposed the particular ambivalence and ambiguity of the psychological and social self. Simmel centred mainly on the boundaries of class dynamics within fashion, but his insistence on the fundamental ambivalence of social and cultural forms marked his work as singularly perceptive of the fashion medium at an early stage in the development of fashion analysis. Symbolic interactionism, an American school which developed from the work of theorists such as Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969), has further been concerned to address ambivalence and ambiguity in many different areas of ongoing social life. In this tradition, theorists such as Kaiser (1990), Kaiser, Nagasawa & Hutton (1991), Stone (1970) and Davis (1992) have all taken the ambivalences of selves and cultures as the central points in their analysis.

The ambivalence and ambiguity of social experience is, like the analyses of Flugel, Simmel and symbolic interactionist approaches, not necessarily limited to singular dimensions of operation. Our identities are not simply shaped by sexuality - or, for that matter, by relationships of gender or ethnicity - as distinct or autonomous sets of social relationships. Rather, our identities arise out of the junctures between these interrelational social forms, and the processes of material and symbolic mapping which layer our perception of, and integration with, our social world; in all its ambiguity. Although the analyses detailed above cannot necessarily be taken by themselves as explanations of the way in which identities and fashions relate, each argument is itself useful in describing and explaining specific aspects of these processes. The form of the inquiry is, however, the important point to grasp; the recognition of conceptual variables as ambivalent in both description and activity. The consideration and integration of these thematic premises is a crucial first step in reconciling and specifying identities as emergent.

(3) IDENTITY AS SINGULAR AND FRAGMENTARY

> We proceed as if we were faced with a choice between the univocal and the ambiguous, and we come to the discovery... that the univocal has its foundations and consequences in ambiguities.
>
> Richard McKeon
> in *The Flight from Ambiguity*

It soon becomes apparent throughout the discussion of fashions as related to identities, that many social thinkers - especially in their approach to fashion as a function of quite separate and discrete social dynamics - attempt to formulate a singular, monolithic and univocal conceptualisation of identity.

The disparity between singular theoretical explanations of social phenomena, and the ambivalent reality of identity and fashion which these hypothetical generalisations seek to represent, is, as Levine (1985) notes, a product of predominantly enlightenment thinking within the social sciences. The development of scientific knowledge throughout the early modern period, particularly in mathematics and the natural sciences, encouraged a predilection for empirical and symbolic precision not only throughout scientific intellectual pursuit but also throughout modes of thinking in other areas of society. The consequent development of social knowledge as science similarly produced a number of corollorative suppositions which effectively resulted in the systematic underrepresentation and marginalisation of ambivalence and ambiguity in social thinking.

The construction of a univocal mode of representation in precise language, akin to that of mathematics, is evident in any number of early social scientific writings: The social mathematics of Condorcet, or Durkheim's construction of social facts are two cases in point, not to mention the class formulations of particular brands of scientific/objective marxism or Weber's systematic ideal types. These positions are,

admittedly to a greater or lesser degree, all characterised by a desire to rid social science of imprecision and ambiguity. Theoretical rigour, conceptual precision and systematic clarity were the fundamental objectives of social science, as were accurate empirical procedure, measurement and categorisation. Underlying these notions was an assumption that to be scientific necessarily means eradicating all ambiguity and ambivalence from the context of social science, the ultimate consequences of which were to ignore the intrinsic ambivalence of social life, to disregard the ambiguity inherent in conceptual meaning within social scientific disciplines, and to ultimately neglect the constructive function that ambivalence may play in social theorisation.

The marginalisation of ambivalence and ambiguity in social life is evident in a number of the theoretical paradigms discussed above. Fashion is characterised as a predominantly class phenomenon; *or* a cultural form derived from market differentiation, *or* a social practice expressing predominantly unconscious sexual desires. In each case, the social practices associated with fashion are considered the reflection of more fundamental social activities, and in many instances the evidence for this argument is well documented. Social subjects are positioned in economic power relations of class, as well as through the differentiation of `lifestyle' on the commodity market and through the social unconscious in sexual relationships. Social subjects are not, however, eternally fixed in these positions; and the tendency to view them as such is a disposition to close or resolve an ambiguity in fashion which is experientially open. Rather, subjective identities are formed through these processes simultaneously, as well as through many more such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion and politics; furthermore, identities substantially inform these processes as social subjects are interpellated in both the material and ideological aspects of discourse. Fashion is not only the effect of other structuring social relationships, but also the cause. In the same way, it is both the cause and effect of identities. The inherent contradictions of fashionable cultural forms are captured in identities, which are fluid in an emergent sense. The analytics above which focus specifically on the ambivalence of fashion, and simultaneously on the contradictory elements of identities both within and between social subjects, are the paradigms which initiate a multivocal investigation of fashions, and the specific points at which they articulate the

contradictions of identities.

The popular response of social science to ambiguity and/or ambivalence is either to disregard it as far as possible, or conversely to recognise that meaning is multivocal; but only to the extent that if meaning is not attached to the conceptual vocabulary of social science in a univalent fashion, then it is appropriate to abstain from using ambiguous terms altogether. Within these explanations of fashion and identity however, it is impossible to differentiate between necessarily singular and multiple explanations of identity. The culture of social science is such that each statement of identity, while articulating a fragment of identity as singular for consideration by learned colleagues, necessarily has its origin within shifting boundaries of exclusion, of difference, and is thus situated in ambiguity. Even if there is no necessarily explicit recognition of theoretical ambivalence in fashion literature, the simultaneous enunciation of both the continuous and the multiple, the singular and dislocated aspects of identity is implicitly present in most fashion texts.

As Hall (1991:48) notes, accompanying every history that is written, is a history of the other which is the basis of the first; `There is no other history except to take the absences and the silences along with what can be spoken'. In recognising the relationship between experiential ambivalence on the one hand, and conceptual ambivalence on the other in this way, Hall identifies one of the central problems in theorising identities, especially in the complex cultural context of fashion; how to recognise cultural ambivalence in its occurrence, and adequately account for this complexity through a conceptualisation of identity which apprehends and articulates through theoretical ambivalence. This paradoxical formulation, contradictory in itself because it suggests a separation between theory and culture which does not exist, is possibly well served by Derrida and the slide from the articulation of **difference** to the articulation of **differance**.

Differance is perpetually suspended between the enunciation of meaning as constituted in `difference' and the way in which meaning is constantly `deferred'. Differance is therefore captured within the moment of meaning deferral as constructed

through difference. Differance has a textual power which is neither singularly embodied by the two terms of which it is comprised, nor explained by these two composite elements in conjunction. The sense of the term retains its genesis in one meaning whilst continually shifting to envelop another in the constant sliding and dislocation of the signifier. It is both within, and necessarily outside, the terms of differance that ambiguity and ambivalence are related. Whereas experiential ambiguity suggests a state or property in social phenomena in which meaning is polysemitic and/or unclear, ambivalence in social life suggests the coexistence or contiguous expression of diametrically opposed constitutional elements. In **differance** however, ambivalence is never finally constituted dichotomously, as the signifying elements are perpetually deferred.

Fashions and identities as ambivalent social phenomena are therefore indeterminate in this sense, especially in their constitution as an image. They are therefore

> (u)ndecidables - those baffling yet ubiquitous unities that, in Derrida's words...'can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (Bauman:1991:55).

Fashions, as both fictional and real, and identities, as micro-narratives (Lyotard:1979/1984), articulate neither conformity nor differentiation in totality, nor even elements of both dynamics combined. Rather they express both sociation and individuation simultaneously; and remain effectively marginal to be an expression of neither in entirety. Not only are fashions and identities ambiguous in the sense that both may concurrently express multiple meanings, but they are ambivalent in the sense that the multiple meanings which coexist within social individuals may at the same time transform and be transformed, may void and be voided. As undecidables, both

> are *neither/nor*; which is to say that they militate against the *either/or*. Their underdetermination is their potency: because they are nothing they may be all. They put paid to the ordering power of the opposition, and so to the ordering power of the narrators of the opposition... Undecidables brutally expose the artifice, the fragility, the sham of the most vital of separations. They bring the outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with the suspicion of chaos (Bauman:1991:55).

To misconstrue differance is to engage in the endless playful deconstructionism of academic misappropriations of the term. Meaning is abrogated in the proliferation of texts, in which each meaning is erased as soon as it is constituted; it is to ignore the theoretical ambivalence in any position of meaning. This activity effaces the historical **context** of meaning in which politics insists on the preservation of tension between the identities which are articulated and those which are not, which requires the movement of meaning between dislocated positions **at the same time** more than either/or. In Hall's terms, this formulation stipulates, although always with absence and silence, the recognition that identity is always

> contingent. It is a positioning. It is the cut of ideology which, across the semiosis of language, constitutes meaning... To think it only in terms of difference and not in terms of the relational position between the suturing, the arbitrary, overdetermined cut of language which says something which is instantly opened again to the play of meaning; not to think of meaning always, in supplement, that there is always something left over, always something which goes on escaping the precision... (Hall:1991:50-51).

To treat meaning in this way, is to complement experiential ambivalence with theoretical ambivalence, and to recognise the ongoing construction of both.

This mode of analysis presents some formidable difficulties for theorists of fashions and identities however. The central conceptual problem that arises in course of tracing differance in social meaning, is the question of where the deferral of meaning **ends** in the construction of difference. If every articulation is continuously open and negotiable, it becomes difficult - if not impossible - to enunciate any premises or foundations on which any social theory might be based; radical indeterminacy becomes an `essentialism of elements' (Best & Kellner:1991:195). If philosophical foundations of social analytics cannot be posited in some meaningful sense, then the formulation becomes open to the charge of constant relativism. That is, any articulation cannot be held valid for any other historical, political, social or cultural configuration other than that in which the articulation occurs. If meaning is constantly deferred, how does meaning - for example the representational meanings of fashions - remain **recognisable** as such? How is it possible to formulate **common** meaning; or, more properly, what mechanisms **do** people utilise to establish generic or collective boundaries of meaning in the common social institutions and processes

evident in our social and cultural milieu?

Hall's (1991) answer to this challenge is to reiterate that meaning is not **only** ever deferred, but also **always** constituted in difference; and that the theoretical project is to recognise the tension between the two terms, and thus preserve the challenge that may be made to differentiating and oppositional terms of reference. Perhaps it is useful to approach the tension between difference and deferral as a cyclical process, rather than a binary or dichotomous operation which negates the employment of one term when the other is present. McKie and Bennett (1992) suggest that the potentiality of meaning is always circumscribed; that while any text initiates movement within complex webs of meaning, the text also acts as a `strange attractor'. Dynamic systems are influenced by strange attractors in unpredictable but nevertheless regular and recurring movements. Within a textual network, the text initiates the unpredictable circulation of meaning, but meaning which is nevertheless circumscribed through regular and recurring boundaries. The text will `delimit the arena of the struggle for ...meaning by marking the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated' (Fiske:1987:269).

The facility of these types of concepts have yet to be extensively or convincingly outlined however, and at the present time questions of a political nature continue. In the field of fashion, the degree to which the political and cultural spheres overlap or interpenetrate is extremely contentious within social theory (Gibbins:1989). Even leaving aside this extensive and complex debate however, when the notion of indeterminacy or ambivalence is introduced in conjunction with politics - as in the above instance - the formulation immediately encounters difficulties. To posit a politics in which the meaning of political articulation is constantly open to deferral, may be to advocate a kind of relativism in which any statement **cannot** be validated by any collective agreement of meaning, as each meaning is deferred both within and between fractal social subjects. The issue for critical social praxis and politics on the left then, is how concepts such as differance determine the limits of an acceptable politics which does not disintegrate into a kind of renewed liberalism; and further, how these concepts might establish political foundations at all when the social subject

is posed as intrinsically ambivalent, and all meaning is ambiguous. In this sense, the very notion of the `political' is in question. Do these types of formulation mean the `death of the political' (along with the `death of the subject') as a viable category of social organisation? Can the left any longer expect to organise groups of people around general political principles?

The debates surrounding these questions are prolific, and close consideration of the field is precluded in this context. The debate is particularly relevant, however, for the theorisation of the social subject within feminist political critiques of the various identities attributed to women in processes of gender and power. The premises of these debates should therefore be at least recognised in any context which discusses gender identities in relation to ambivalent cultural processes such as fashion. The articulation of political ideas and ideals has imposed boundaries of meaning on the social phenomena defined as political in different social and historical contexts; until the 1960s for example, when the personal became political for feminist movements, the political was confined to the public sphere. The development of meaning, and the recognition of different identities between and within social subjects has tended to occur progressively within political movements as social circumstances have changed. Since its inception, feminisms have been concerned to preserve the politics intrinsic to the construction of meaning, and to engage with gender identities as structured through particular social and historical contexts. In the next chapter, I want to argue that certain forms of feminist theory, as much as other dominant forms of theorising in the social sciences, have historically misconstrued the ambivalence of identities and fashions, positing instead a univocal conceptual mode of representation. At the same time, however, I hope to delineate those modes of feminist theory which begin to engage with ambivalence in fashions and gender identities. The question of politics remains as contentious within feminist analytics as in any other arena of social investigation. At the close of the following chapter, I will briefly indicate philosophies which explore the possibilities for multivocal feminist theories and praxis of subjective identities, which simultaneously attempt to preserve the distinctly political nature of feminism. The relative facility of these arguments remain contentious. However, I will finally argue that useful connections may be gleaned to

aid projects of feminism from the contingent connections between various feminisms and specific postmodernist theories.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDER AND AMBIVALENCE

(1) GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITIES

> `Be what you would seem to be' - or, if you'd like to put it more simply - `Never imagine yourself to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise'.
>
> Lewis Carroll
> *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Gender is one of the formative delineations of identity in contemporary society, and is one of the fundamental structuring principles in the creation and reception of cultural artefacts, of which fashion is a notable example.

The arguments in the last chapter implicitly contained assumptions, some more explicit than others, around both the gendered nature of fashion and gender identity. Throughout this chapter, my aim is to elucidate the feminist conceptual field, debating the significance of gender and gender identity within the analysis of fashion. Gender identity, especially as expressed in and constituted by cultural artefacts such as fashion, has been an important source of feminist scholarship throughout the contemporary women's liberation movement. The point of feminist theorisations of identity have been, on the one hand, to challenge universalising patriarchal definitions of the subject in which the white, middle class male perspective constitutes the only

reality, and on the other hand, to expose the foundationalist assumptions in much of the social science literature around identity. However, in attempting to subvert a normalised fixed and stable gender identity, and the means through which it is expressed in fashion's gender divide, ironically feminists have often reinforced the normative proscription of dichotomous gender categories which they seek to critique.

I will initially explore the way in which contemporary feminism has conceptualised gender and gender identity throughout recent debates, and illustrate the means through which different conceptualisations of identity have become fused with assumptions around fashion. My central argument is that certain feminist positions demonstrate an uncritical acceptance of dominant expectations of identity which serves both to support the political assumptions upon which dominant models of identity are based, and simultaneously establishes models of identity which become divisive and apolitical; a situation which becomes unproductive for many feminist goals. Recent feminist scholarship has suggested conceptual alternatives which begin to address the ambivalence which I posit as central to the processes of fashion identification, and which is crucial in the analytical identification of gender.

GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITIES

Gender, as with other components of identification processes, is constituted through difference. In feminist theory there is significant debate as to the relationship between sex and gender, and the extent to which difference is created and maintained through each of these variables.

The conceptual apparatus through which feminism has described and explained the subjective experience of being a man or a woman, is predominantly founded on a historically developed distinction between the terms `sex' and `gender'. Early feminist theory, in its imperative as social movement concerned with the critique of gendered power, instituted a distinction between the terms sex and gender (Oakley:1981); that is, a critique of the dominant ideology which simply posits differences between men

and women at the physiological, psychological and social levels as a function of fixed and unchanging biological characteristics, usually singularly denoted as sexual difference. The primary advantage of this distinction for feminism was to separate off consideration of genetic, innate and physiologically based characteristics which are possessed by either men or women, described as sex, and those characteristics that are environmentally, psychologically or sociologically constructed, commonly referred to as gender. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly for feminism's social goals, the division served to emphasise the notion that `men' and `women' were socially constituted beings rather than simply biological animals, and that the social component of human beings was the most important consideration in the last analysis. Ultimately, the position of gender as primarily social within this theoretical construct implied that gender could be changed.

As I argued earlier, however, human beings are significantly embodied, and the mediation of the physiological body through social processes implies the simultaneous construction of physiological, psychological, social and cultural aspects of subjectivities and identities. To pose the distinction between sex and gender as analytically separable components of ontological reality (whether the analysis is marxist/socialist, radical or liberal feminist in origin, or whether gender or sex is attributed as determinant), is to ignore the extent to which physiological difference is constructed with and through social categorisation in sexual morphology. Gayle Rubin (1975) was one of the first feminist writers to propose that sex and sexual difference are not independent and prefigurative of social inscription, but are rather inextricably bound to the cultural practices and social norms that constitute the ongoing formation of gender.

Some feminist literature did acknowledge the discussion of gender as a purely theoretical construct rather than an empirically identifiable category. Gender is primarily ideological and cultural, not readily observable or measurable, and the facility of gender is therefore as a primarily explanatory rather than descriptive concept. Depending on the orientation of the particular theorist concerned, then, gender may be given a more or less determinant role as a component factor in social

interaction and the processes of identity formation. Although the notion of gender as a singularly theoretical construct is questionable given the interaction of theory and cultural practice, it is at the junctures of a theoretical praxis that gender is seen to interact with other social relations and identification practices. As with the conceptualisation of identity that I discussed in the previous chapter, gender becomes a relational process rather than a necessarily constituent set of social institutions and ideological relations; a processual and reflexive dynamic instead of a permanent and monolithic category of empirical reality. There cannot be a single origin of either gender or gender identity in contemporary society, and feminist scholarship should begin to evolve the conceptual means through which to theorise processes so complex and interdependent that they cannot be disengaged. As Jane Flax suggests,

> `Gender Relations' is a category meant to capture a complex set of social relations, to refer to a changing set of historically variable social processes. Gender, both as an analytic category and a social process, is relational. That is, gender relations are complex and unstable processes (or temporary `totalities' in the language of dialectics) constituted by and through interrelated parts. These parts are interdependent, that is, each part can have no meaning or existence without the others (Flax, in Edwards:1989:6).

Within this mode of conceptualisation, ambiguity and ambivalence are the centre of analysis. Rather than posing monolithic and independent social structures which are thereafter linked with each other, the analysis begins at the multiple junctures of contingence, interdependence and displacement of discourse which are created and transformed through individual and collective identification processes. The unity of theoretical categories such as gender, class, or even `women' fragment and become ambivalent processes framed in ambiguity. In historically specific theoretical and social praxis, action is not prefigurative but social subject positions are rather constructed through the differentiation of meaning which is constantly deferred in signifying practice. Discursive practices always articulate, and are maintained through notions of gender. For feminism,

> (g)iven the emphasis on fragmentation and internal difference, the gender categories do not look very stable. The fragmented subject is potentially subversive of any view which asserts a central organising principle. For this reason, Braidotti (1989) stresses the need to assert `the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience, the refusal to disembody sexual difference into a new allegedly postmodern anti-essentialist subject, and the will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women'(Pringle:1990:11-12).

This emergent conceptualisation of gender within feminist thought is important to bear in mind when examining feminist literature around fashion, and the implications each text has for a particular `gender identity' in women. I will be suggesting that many earlier feminist writings are insensitive to the notion of ambivalence and/or ambiguity in identity, and that gender is more or less fixed in several instances. Recent feminist scholarship however, has gone some way towards positing multiple sites for the creation, transformation and articulation of gender identity.

(2) FEMINISMS, FASHIONS, IDENTITIES

Fashion has been an obvious subject of scrutiny for feminisms since the inception of the `modern' women's liberation movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Not only are gender boundaries some of the most obviously delineated differences within fashion, but fashion is ubiquitously considered an exclusively `feminine' activity. Fashion remains, however, a field fraught with contradiction for feminist scholarship. On the one hand, feminist research must recognise and devote energy to the study of those social activities which form the basis of both social conceptions of `women' and `femininity', and occupy extensive time and space in women's lives. At the same time, however, feminism does not want to be ghettoised within the academy in the exclusive study of what are regarded (however incorrectly) as `feminine' spheres, nor do they wish to be disregarded by `serious' scholars (who are involved with `real' political issues) for their examination of what are commonly perceived as frivolous and irrational pursuits.

Feminism - as a movement oriented and organised around the specific concerns of `women' as a social group - has been against the epistemological premises of philosophic enlightenment: the alleged neutrality and objectivity of institutional social science; the paradigm of reason and rationality as a historically constructed, and particularly masculine model; and the claims to universal applicability of theoretical models which have generally been valid only for men of particular classes and

cultures. At the same time however, strands of feminism have become susceptible to criticisms in relation to their philosophical predecessors. While feminist theories have not tended to evolve paradigms which have transcendental status, some forms of feminism may nevertheless be accused of leaning towards essentialist and deterministic explanations of women's oppression. In attempting to locate the `cause' of women's oppression in society, and concurrently theorising a collective subject identity - `woman'/`women' - in society, feminists have variously posited both western culture, biology and gender as determining and ahistorical.

Feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1984) have argued that a woman's ongoing labour of managing her body and her appearance is ostensibly exchanged for economic support; and, like the management of a home, the process of maintaining a fashionable appearance is never complete. Paradoxically, however, fashion also becomes a labour that enables women to take possession of their bodies - in much the same way as they do their domestic lives through housework - and therefore offer possibilities for women to change and recreate their own circumstances.

Fashion therefore comes to fulfil a critical sphere of resistance in women's lives. Whereas much of patriarchal culture requires the ongoing labour of women in maintaining the material continuity of both production and reproduction - while men assume positions of `discontinuity, discovery, change in all its forms' (Hermann:1980:172) - fashion enables women to pursue possibilities for change, creativity and exploration that have been largely denied them in other spheres. Whilst the social and economic advantages for patriarchy of a gendered imbalance of power are generally obvious, women have maintained an autonomy in the aesthetic dimensions of ongoing existence.

Feminist theory has, from its inception, developed a critical epistemological stance towards the assumptions and universalising claims established by the social scientific academy in its modern moment. Feminist theories have emerged against previously established traditions of thought, as in the case of contradictory positions presented by (neo)marxist and (neo)freudian feminism. These analyses, however, have

simultaneously arisen alongside positions explicitly concerned with gender difference; and the former have often been subsumed to the latter in the historical and political context of the contemporary women's movement where the personal has become the political. Thus, contemporary feminist theories at once attempt to balance a mistrust of theoretical abstraction which might be antagonistic to the concrete lives and social practices of women; critique existing patriarchal theory while also utilising their concepts subversively in the explanation of gender; avoid the universalising practices of patriarchy whilst simultaneously eschewing essentialist explanations of gender; and attempt to develop a distinctively feminist position whilst integrating these into mainstream academic thought, avoiding co-optation and preserving political focus. Different strands of feminism have thus conceptualised the occurrence of gender difference in fashion in a variety of ways, each position to some extent interrogating the others.

FASHIONING FEMINISMS

Wilson (1985) notes that it is, indeed, difficult to discuss fashion in relation to feminism; not only because so many different strands of feminism have explicated some aspect of fashion in their theorising around gender relations more generally, but more importantly because much of the analysis and feminist criticism of these subjects is very rarely made explicit. This situation is due, at least in part, to negative media portrayals of the women's liberation movement from the 1960s (especially in its `bra-burning' sensationalism), and also to negative and stereotypical depictions of women and the feminine in wider popular media culture. Nevertheless, certain strands of feminist thought might be explicitly associated with particular positions towards fashion and the gender boundaries of identity that are continuously created and transformed within its sphere of influence.

Susan Kaiser (1990:7-12) argues that several paradigms of feminist thought become apparent - and their view of fashion might be extrapolated - when analysing the question of `gender difference when coded in personal appearance'.

The feminism of the Liberal humanist tradition, for example - like its philosophical predecessors - primarily advocates civil, social and economic equality for women within existing social institutions, and argues for equality of opportunity in every sphere of social existence - including the question of dress. In terms of fashion, this translates into a populist liberal position which, while acknowledging the rights of the **individual** to dress as they wish, encourages **women** to dress in ways which will promote their entrance into male dominated social spheres. This stance implies an acceptance of the status quo - the established social order - providing that women are included as equals within the hierarchies that already exist. Liberal advocacy (or at least acceptance) of the `Dress for Success' ethos that became popular during the 1980s demonstrates the ideological commitment of liberal feminism to an uncritical compliance with inequalities that exist between women of different classes and ethnic groups. The business suit - in skirted form, of course - which symbolised the competent professional woman `making it' in a male dominated public sphere was - and often continues to be - the liberal sartorial model of equality for women. In Langridge's (1990) terms, for example,

> (a)nything which emphasises your femininity draws attention to your gender, thereby detracting from people's perception of you as a *person*. Your male counterparts will treat you like a lady... Being a woman is not an advantage in business at present, but being intelligent, self-motivated and professional is... You can be a sex object or a business woman, but you can't be both... Aim for an executive look, mature, no-nonsense and business-like (1990:63-64).

This model of both women and fashion is ultimately representative of very few women across different ethnic or class groups - it is difficult, for example, to imagine any women other than those in middle class management carrying out the professional prescriptions of the `dress for success' look.[1]

Needless to say, the liberal feminist analysis of gendered fashion directly transposes the model of identity inherent in the liberal enlightenment tradition, based on individual ability to reason (Jaggar:1983:33-48). Each individual - regardless of their gender or/and social position - is regarded as a conscious and rational subject who makes their own decisions concerning the form and quality of their lives. This `rational choice' model, used extensively in liberal economics, presumes a certain

transparency in social relations through which individuals negotiate their choices. Power relations and social hierarchies remain largely unproblematic, as each individual's place within the social order is essentially chosen by their own action. The only points at which a social group is taken as the analytic medium are those occasions in which the civil liberties and democratic rights of a particular social group are perceived to be threatened - as in the case of pay equity and equal education in relation to women. In all other cases, the individual chooses what to wear, and lives with the consequences of that decision.

This view of gendered appearance - and the concept of gender identity more generally - has been loudly denounced by feminists of rather different philosophical and political opinions, who criticise its abstract individualism and egoistic conceptualisation of autonomy. Marxist feminists, for example, would take issue with the view of social reality typified by the liberal position. Like liberal feminism, marxist feminism arises out of a long tradition of philosophical thought within the social sciences and politics. In contrast however, it is both a theory and politics which is ultimately opposed to the tenets of liberalism. As the marxist tradition revolves around class relationships within the system of production in the capitalist economy, so too does the marxist feminist position; although they have added consideration of gender issues in production and reproduction to the formulation. In general terms, little of marxian feminist attention has centred on fashion or gendered appearances, but from their metatheoretical stance it might be expected that their position would revolve around: The inequities associated with the production and consumption of fashion in both local (class) and global (imperialisation and colonisation) terms; the reproduction of certain aspects of women's oppression associated with the maintenance of `femininity' as a middle class concept; and the concomitant exchange value rendered to women's bodies through the processes of objectification in image-making. The central contentions of the marxist analysis of fashion would therefore be most concerned with the socio-economic inequalities associated with the production, distribution and consumption of fashionable styles, and the way in which these contribute to women's oppression in a class society, rather than the evolution of meaning around gender in any particular style (Hansen & Reed:1986).

The general argument is reminiscent of those analyses outlined earlier around the production and dissemination of `commodity aesthetics', its similarity mainly originating in parallel conceptual uses of `use value' and `exchange value'. Haug (1986:73) implies that women are more likely to focus on the exchange value of clothing commodities in preference to the use value of other, perhaps less aesthetic objects. As we have already seen however, it is extremely difficult to differentiate between what might be considered wants and needs, and it is similarly complex to attempt to unravel what might constitute use value as opposed to exchange value.

As Flax (1987) argues, marxist feminism has tended to uncritically apply conceptual schemes originating in a specific socio-economic and political context to material relations of production and consumption in the present era. As in the traditional marxist model, the marxist feminist representation of social subjectivity and identities ultimately reverts to the presumption of a `false consciousness' on the part of women fashion consumers. A global industry that (so far) exemplifies the capitalist ethic of profit is determining in a material sense in women's lives according to the marxist argument. This, in a sense, is a result of the marxist feminist inclination to locate the `cause' of women's oppression in the same sense that Marx formulated the historical evolution of capitalism and class society. In locating the source of women's oppression within the structures of class relationships (Engels:1884), the question of gendered appearance in fashion reverts to an assessment of whose consciousness has been raised in relation to commodification within the global fashion industry. Thus, although the marxist model draws our attention to the global and capitalist nature of the commodified fashion industry, and class differences between consumption, it does little to enlighten the theorist of fashion on the ways in which the boundaries of gender are continuously negotiated through processes of identification within specific social contexts.

Radical feminism has a comparable project to that of marxist feminism in establishing the foundations of women's oppression. Radical feminist praxis gains much of its theoretical impetus from reaction to the subordination of women in traditional liberal and socialist theory. At the end of the 1960s, women were beginning to explore and

discuss their own experiences of oppression, attempting to articulate their own social position as women, and provide an autonomous movement to express their own interests. Through `consciousness-raising' activities at the `grass-roots' level, women therefore began to recognise the systematic and institutionalised nature of women's subordination. Although its origins preclude a highly explicit and systematic adherence to a particular political theory in the same sense as liberalism or socialism, radical feminism has nevertheless come to dominate a significant section of feminist thought. Scholars and supporters of general radical feminist principles range from the `sex role' oriented radical feminism of Kate Millett (1969), the materialist radical feminism of Shulamith Firestone (1971), to the more `cultural' radical feminism of Mary Daly (1978), Robin Morgan (1970), Susan Griffin (1978), Dale Spender (1982) and Andrea Dworkin (1980); a primary concern of all these different perspectives is to concentrate on the structuring principles of gender within society, and the way in which women are both differentiated from, and subordinated to, men. According to the radical feminist position, gender - a social category based on biological sex - is the primary structuring principle in virtually every aspect of social relations; and rather than appearing as an alterable categorising principle in social relations, gender instead structures the very framework through which we perceive, interpret and understand our social reality. Furthermore, gender is not only the way in which human beings are differentiated into social groups, but is also expressed as an elaborate system of male domination and female subordination - the conceptual denotation of `patriarchy'. Within patriarchy, men are identified as the enemy by virtue of their superior position in the patriarchal structure, and all women are oppressed by all men in male created and male defined social institutions. The theoretical impetus in radical feminism is thus to understand this patriarchal system of oppression, and the political agenda is to bring about its demise.

While radical and cultural feminist thought is extremely diverse, and certainly too extensive to engage with in any great depth at this point, this tradition of thought is nevertheless one aspect of feminist theory and politics that has been definitive in its stance on women's relationship to fashion. Some of the earliest writing of radical feminism during the 1970s appropriated the language and concepts of liberal

feminism in `sex-role' analysis. While Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) demonstrates the construction of sex roles into masculine and feminine spheres as a socially created and maintained process, she also coined the term `unisex' to connote an androgynous ideal of human nature - simultaneously expressed in appearance - which would effectively dismantle the inequities between men and women. Rudi Gernreich's designs demonstrated this androgynous ideal at the beginning of the 1970s, proposing body suits for younger people and full length gowns for those older and less willing to display their bodies (Smith & Peiss:1989). While his assertion that generational distinction is more `naturally' defined than gender distinction is certainly a product of the generational strife of the late 1960s, one might also argue that the ideal of androgyny draws more from masculine dress than it does from women's fashion. While it has become acceptable for women to wear trousers, it has certainly not become acceptable for men to wear dresses. As Wilson (1985) succinctly argues in any case, androgyny has ceased to be an issue of gender distinction and its resolution for women, as in the contemporary fashion world, fashion frolics endlessly with the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, shifting and reshaping the expression and form of our sexual and gender (amongst other) identities.

Other forms of radical feminism which focus on the subordination of women perceive fashion to be a readily identifiable expression of the restrictions imposed upon women by men, as an instance of both patriarchal - and , by implication, capitalist - power. Women are constrained psychologically and socially in the construction of femininity through media and advertising; and physically, in the crippling fashions they are compelled to wear by a collusion between male designers and their female lackeys. Feminist rejection of fashion in this vein is fairly popular and widespread amongst certain proponents of the feminist movement. Susan Brownmiller, for example, launches a prolonged assault upon the concept of femininity as enshrined in feminine clothing. While she acknowledges that personal adornment can be a pleasurable and creative process, she equally asserts the maintenance of a feminist dress code which excludes both the traditional symbols of sartorial femininity, and the symbolically masculine fashion of the `dress for sucess' as advocated by liberal feminists. According to Brownmiller,

> the nature of feminine dressing is superficial in essence...But that is the point. To care about feminine fashion, and to do it well, is to be obsessively involved in inconsequential details on a serious basis (1984:81).

Barbara Kimball further asserts that

> (a)s `sex objects' women have submitted to miserable confinement and restriction...in the western world, tortuously corseted bodies. As recently as the twentieth century women wore hobble skirts, which reduced walking to mincing little steps. Even little girls were corseted (1981:130).

`The Folly of Fashion' adversely affects every aspect of women's lives in the radical paradigm, and fashion continues to be perceived as a restrictive practice in which women are actively subordinated by both male designers, and the male general public.

> Women may no longer half-kill themselves with corsets, but the attitudes which brought on such excesses are still with us; they surface again with every `new look' foisted on a willing public. No longer the privilege of the rich alone, fashion has discovered the mass market, and the men who run the rag trade are laughing all the way to the bank...But far more than the profit motive underlies the whole fashion game. As long as women can be induced to play it, their time, attention, energy and cash are being harmlessly frittered away, rather than diverted to more threatening ends - such as their own liberation...For women and men both, a woman's true identity is seen to be closely bound up with how she looks rather than what she does, or even who she is. She chooses an image when she chooses an outfit or hairstyle and that image takes the place of her real self...Whatever the fashion, it is presented in sexual terms. Invisible male eyes are on you, and being in fashion will make sure you get, and keep, a man. As you might expect, this is a lie too. Men may indeed notice overtly sexy clothes, but their reactions are mixed, varying from rape to stoning (Else:1990:14-16).

The cultural feminism that developed from radical feminist theory in the United States focuses less on the destructive effects of patriarchal fashion (although they wholeheartedly share this view) and women's biology or sexuality as a **problem**. This position concentrates more on the specific and positive values and practices associated with women's reproductive and mothering role. Thus, women's special qualities should be reflected in their dress, avoiding as far as possible patriarchal fashion, but rather celebrating women's bodies in the clothes they wear. It is difficult, however, to gain insight into what these forms of dress might be. Mary Daly (1978:45:305) for example, draws on Virginia Woolf to eloquently satirise masculine academic and military ritual dress. At the same time she maintains that the contemporary world comprises `women who are filled with self-loathing, and who are unable to bond with the loathed mirror-images of their decaying selves. Such fashioned and fashionable

women are not caked with mud and faeces, but are encrusted in the mold of man-made femininity'. Unfortunately however, there is little to indicate what ultimate form her conception of gyn/ecological women's clothing might take.

Lesbian feminism has variously supported the negative view of fashion proposed by radical feminist analysis. I am not associating lesbian feminists in general with cultural and radical feminism in any denotative or essential sense. Lesbian women, of course, may be adherents of any number of theoretical or political stances within the feminist movement. I am instead particularly referring to certain lesbian feminist positions which explicitly side with radical feminism in associating `compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' with the male-defined norms of heterosexual femininity perceived to be instrumental in women's oppression. Adrienne Rich, in one of the strongest lesbian/radical statements against traditional fashion and adornment, categorises `feminine dress codes' and *haute couture* fashion as informed by the same impulse as foot binding, the veil, purdah, sexual harassment and rape (1983:219). This view has not, however, gone unchallenged within the lesbian feminist community. Commentators draw attention to the fact that lesbian women are dressing for other women as much as for the public at large, and have had a historically diverse relationship with fashion - the long-standing `butch' and `femme' styles of dress, for example, express different forms of lesbian identities, and may be pleasurable for the women who wear them (Wilson:1990b:67-74). Wilson similarly argues that

> it still seems as if heterosexuality sets the parameters of the terms in which lesbians and gay men may be defined and define themselves. Lesbian spectatorship, lesbian photography and lesbian self-adornment may be seen as an attempt to cross this boundary. The investigation of desire and its construction is likely to start from or at least to include some of the trappings of heterosexual desire, but the lesbian artifice of leather, silk and make-up uses it as the *bricolage* of a dominant culture it challenges by subverting a language we had thought was familiar, but which is now made strange (1991:58).

The fundamental problem with the radical image of fashion is that while it draws our attention to some vital feminist concerns in the gender images produced through the cultural representation of women, this does not necessarily preclude the use and enjoyment of fashion - especially in its oppositional forms - for feminist practice. There is a dichotomy in operation within the radical conceptualisation of fashion

which suggests that fashion is a construction of `heteropatriarchy' and therefore unacceptable, and the only other position that might be articulated is a liberal and uncritical acceptance of populism in fashion. This is reflected in the model of identity which the radical analysis of fashion implies. Just as radical feminism demonstrates a certain essentialism through the use of `oppression' as a definitive category in the analysis of fashion as a cultural system of representation, there is also a tendency towards essentialism in the definition of the social subject position of `woman' and the construction of identity in relation to that cultural system. Radical and cultural feminism, echoing the marxist `patriarchal' discourse that went before them, suggest a `false consciousness' on the part of women who consume fashionable commodities. Patriarchy defines women's subjectivities and identities through cultural forms such as fashion, and to escape patriarchy's dictates women must have their `consciousness raised' and dress in a form which is more `natural' and celebratory of women's bodily form - consistent with women's `essential' nature. This erroneously suggests that there is a space outside of fashion, a point at which fashion might be described as pure artifice and its antithesis - whatever that might be - as purely natural. As my discussion has argued, however, there are very few, if any, spheres of life which lie outside of fashion's dictates. Furthermore, the social boundaries between the what is conceived as `natural' and `artificial' are not so incisive as radical feminism implies.

Wilson (1985) suggests that radical feminist analysis of fashion may be linked to a moralistic and puritanical type of ethic which is consistent with dress reform movements that have variously appeared throughout western history. Wilson engages in a detailed and explicit discussion of the various forms and influences of utopian dress and dress reform, concluding that romantic and humanist discourses of `utopias' and the cult of the `natural', a hyper-rational Fabian utilitarianism, and the rise of puritan values within protestantism all prompted different types of dress reform movements at different times. The puritan influence on dress was a conservative criticism of immoral living, as expensive and luxurious dress was necessarily associated with hedonism, self-indulgence and other generally unchristian principles. The continuing development of natural sciences throughout the nineteenth century further contributed to a perception of fashion as unhygienic and restrictive to an

unhealthy degree, which, of course, it often was. The romantic view of dress appealed to those in search of a true `human nature' which could be outwardly expressed through personal adornment, and thus came to adopt what were then considered styles of more innocent times - the simple garb of medieval life, or the pure and unadorned style of the then much admired greek classicism. Fabian utilitarianism was the most extreme form of socialist criticism of the dominant cultural styles in dress, believing that socialist ideals should be expressed in dress as much as any other sphere, and clothing should thus conform to the principles of use value rather than exchange value. While Fabians were as much influenced by eugenics and Darwin's `survival of the fittest' as they were by marxism, other socialist commentators were increasingly turning to the criticism of capitalism as the force producing needless waste. Veblen might therefore be identified as emerging from this tradition of reform literature.

Nineteenth century feminism too, was explicitly associated with dress reform. Amelia Bloomer, in what was considered a scandal and much caricatured by the media of the time, introduced what were possibly the first contemporary trousers for women in the western world - the Bloomer costume. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1857) was also known for her denunciation of nineteenth century women's dress:

> Woman's dress too - how perfectly it describes her condition!... from the bonnet string to the paper shoe, she is the hopeless matyr to the inventions of some parisian imp of fashion. Her tight waist and long, trailing skirts deprive her of all freedom of breath and motion. No wonder man prescribes her sphere. She needs his aid at every turn. He must help her up stairs and down, in the carriage and out, on the horse, up the hill, over the ditch and fence, and thus teach her the poetry of dependence (in Tickner:1982:39).

While Sojourner Truth (1851) articulated fully the white middle class nature of this pronunciation in her famous `Ain't I a Woman?' speech (Haraway:1992:231), dress reform remained high on the (white, middle class) feminist agenda of the nineteenth century. The reformist view of clothing and fashion was probably as much a result of the moralist strand of liberal humanist influence in early feminism (and the real discomfort and even pain associated with the clothing of the time), as it was to do with the claims of the feminist movement. Whether the same could be said of clothing today is dubious; and yet these arguments are precisely echoed in the claims of radical feminism.

Wilson argues that this view of contemporary fashion is one half of a tension within feminism relating to the analysis of contemporary cultural forms more generally. According to Wilson's argument, there is a mutually inconsistent division between two conflicting political debates in feminism; the one side - typified by the radical and marxist arguments outlined above - proposing a rejection of fashion because of its sexist and oppressive character; the other side supporting a popular liberalism which argues for an interest in all of the cultural forms which are enjoyed, and maintained, by women. The former implies a commitment to `cultures of identity', in which human beings might discover and express their true or `authentic' selves without oppression - which seems an unusual position within a movement generally acknowledging the `social construction' of gendered human beings. The latter, on the other hand, recognises the central importance of `image' in modern culture and the diversity and plurality of different fashion codes across a variety of institutional sites. Thus,

> (a)n unresolved tension between `authenticity' and `modernism' haunts contemporary feminism. The recurring theme of women's relationship to nature, of women's utopias, and of the vision of a wholly other world in which `women's values' hold sway suggests a longing for a more `authentic' world, closely bound to `nature' in which we will find our true selves. Engagement in the political battle, the use of avant-garde art, the appropriation of jazz and rock by women's bands and of an anarchic tradition of humour by women comics, and the belief in the social construction of the gendered self represent the `modernist' approach (Wilson:1985:231).

The thesis of an authentic `self' existing somehow beyond culture is a product of the modes of univocal scholarship outlined in the previous chapter. Within the feminism of `authenticity', the individual is placed as a coherent and self-conscious subject in relation to essentialist categories of difference; and the concomitant political identification the subject incurs is thereafter reflected unproblematically in their outward representation or static signification in terms of clothing. One can therefore `identify' an `authentic' or `politically conscious' feminist through their outward appearance. The differentiation of self from other in these terms becomes politically exclusive within the feminist movement. Fashion as a representation of a particular political discourse - feminism - subverts its own goals, and challenges the legitimacy of women who representationally articulate a differential position within feminism. Furthermore, if ambivalence is intrinsic to the processes of identification in individual

and collective cultural systems of representation, the question becomes whether it is not possible for feminism, or particular feminist, to articulate both the authentic and the modern simultaneously.

Feminist psychoanalytic literature, especially different theorists from what is known as the `French feminist' school (such as Irigaray, Kristeva, Hermann and Cixous) have specifically addressed the issues of fragmented and ambivalent social subjects when developing in a feminist vein the earlier psychoanalytic discourse of (primarily) Freud and Lacan. Psychoanalytic literature concentrates mainly on unconscious processes within individuals, and the analysis of gender rests on the assertation that the phallus is the primary or dominant signifier in western culture. Femininity is constituted in difference, in the cultural space through which difference is represented and signified. Although little literature on the analysis of fashion exists with specific regard to feminist psychoanalysis, we might extrapolate the various tenets of different arguments as being centrally concerned with the internal construction of femininity within women's unconscious, and also the way in which `woman' is signified and perceived as the `Other' to `man' in sexual difference. This general orientation produces a wide array of different positions which apply general psychoanalytic theory to women's social position - including the cultural realm. Laura Mulvey for example, in her text `Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'(1975), documents a Lacanian analysis of the way in which woman's presence as part of visual spectacle invokes the image of castration and its simultaneous replacement with the symbolic phallus in women's representation. Through this `phallocentric' equation, woman becomes the `bearer of meaning' rather than the `maker of meaning', and is thus subject to the gaze of the male as dominant; man is the determinant while woman becomes the image. This argument then, would posit woman as the passive recipient of fashion structured for the male gaze: Kaplan (1983) wholeheartedly agrees, but takes Mulvey's discussion further by arguing that not only is woman sexualised and objectified through the male gaze, she also exists as the threat of castration, and must therefore be symbolically annihilated. In phallocentric spectacle, the female viewer must either identify with the male viewer or with the objectified woman (Berger:1972).

This model links the tendency towards fetishism on the part of the male (Mulvey 1982), and the woman as symbolic phallus, to the patriarchal myth of narcissism as an essential component of femininity. The central problem with this conceptualisation of sexually differentiated unconsciousness, especially with regard to fashion, is that it precludes any useful exploration of circumvention or resistance. The formulation of dominant and passive eroticism which is suggested here is determining. Because it focuses on the unconscious, it implies that any conscious subversion of the order on the part of feminists, or women more generally, to be ultimately determined by unconscious processes. This means, firstly, that we cannot know when these unconscious processes are at work, simply by virtue of their unconscious character, and secondly, anything that we wear, even in an attempt at subversion, is, in fact, already determined by these patriarchal mechanisms. It denies any pleasure for women in looking, in desire and in eroticism, claiming that this eroticism will necessarily always be unequal by virtue of the dominant male gaze.

Rather different approaches however, are witnessed by different theorists of the `French feminist school' who concentrate more fully on the Lacanian notion that subjectivity is psychologically constructed through the acquisition of language, and that this process is imbued with `phallogocentric' mechanisms. For the French feminists - whose work is diverse, but who nevertheless share common strands of thought - the phallus becomes the primary signifier of language in a `linear, grammatical linguistic system that orders the symbolic, the superego, the law' (Gauthier:1981:162). In this sense, fashion - as a cultural system in direct relation to both the body and the psyche - is symbolically determined by the operation of the phallus as the dominant signifier. This might be considered on two levels; firstly within the cultural discourse surrounding clothing and its relationship to femininity and beauty culture, and secondly as part of the metaphorical discourse surrounding the space between women and the cultural artefacts - particularly fashion - which surround them. The central concern of this psychoanalytic approach is therefore, in Derrida's terms, to deconstruct the phallus as signifier and supplant it with an alternative feminine discourse.

Critics have implied that this leads to an essentialism, particularly in Irigaray's[2] work for example, modelled on the female genitals, the lips, as the ground from which to `speak'. Others have posited this model as metaphorical and ironic, a certain `poetics of the body' (Gallop:1988). This has radical potential in its positive implications for the analysis of fashion as a cultural mode which intimately associates social, psychological and corporeal elements. The difficulty with Irigaray's work, as Kaiser (1990:11) notes, is how to translate this radical poetics into a deconstruction which positively aids feminist sexual politics. Although Irigaray's model might conceivably be suggested as the alternative feminist discourse through which to construct meaning, the way in which the deconstruction of the phallic signifier and its replacement with an alternative discourse might be achieved remains unclear; especially as the often indefinite unconscious remains the site of struggle.

The notion of the `subject' is central in Irigaray's depiction of sexual differentiation, and this delineates her as a scholar oriented towards poststructuralism as much as Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. While the subject of structuralism applied meaning and order to the world through the operation of opposition - including gender differentiation - the subject of feminist poststructuralism is conceived as acting within a space defined by the assertion of

> total difference, to be that which cannot be pinned down or subjugated within a dichotomous hierarchy. Paradoxically, it is to be what is not (Alcoff:1988:417).

The subject is posited as a discursive construct within specific social relationships of language, ideology and power. Thus, subjectivity is multiple, fragmented and unstable. In poststructuralist terms, fashion may be identified, as it is in various psychoanalytic feminisms, as one instance of patriarchal discourse which structures meaning in a binary oppositional form (masculinity and femininity) and through these means subsequently perpetuates the material and ideological marginalisation of women. Feminism cannot, however, respond to multiple sites of patriarchal power by simplistically asserting the rights or characteristics of women as a definitive group - as this merely perpetuates the gender binarism feminism is seeking to challenge. The task instead is to identify the way in which appearance might, within both general and local struggles over meaning, be constructed as to articulate difference beyond the

boundaries of the male defined gender dichotomy. Fashion is a field in which both the body of femininity in general, and the feminine subject in particular, are constructed in both material and symbolic ways. As Evans and Thornton (1991:61) note, `(c)lothes are not something we wear passively: they require our active collaboration'. In this way it is possible to perceive of fashion as a cultural system of signification in which the subject is simultaneously autonomous and created/regenerated through ideological frameworks in the productive/consumptive cultural/ symbolic system. It addresses

> the historical and cultural specificity of ideological configurations of gendered subjectivity as shaped and fractured by multiple and often contradictory determinants. At the same time, it acknowledges that ideologies of a unifying gender identity may, under certain conditions, have a strategic importance and powerful effects in the development of an oppositional politics (Felski:1989:237).

The adoption of any particular position simultaneously implies a challenge/reversion of that position. Identity becomes the site of unstable contention between a discourse of an essential gendered subject and the discourse of textually constructed subjectivity. An expression of feminist fashion as identity therefore, may be perceived as a politics of `positionality', in which, firstly,

> the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilised (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply being the place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness) The concept of woman (or feminist) as positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values (Alcoff:1988:434).

The concept of positionality seems to offer feminism a more useful analysis of women's formation of identity through both conscious and unconscious subjective processes within fashion, and within wider cultural spheres, than those feminist paradigms which posit a singular `essential' being determined by natural biology or straightforward economic hierarchies.

(3) FEMINISM AND AMBIVALENCE

If feminism is to acknowledge the increasing ambivalence in western cultural forms, in the contemporary western subject, and in the way in which intellectual knowledge is increasingly ambivalent, then it must continue to search for both theoretical and empirical means through which this ambivalence might be identified and accounted for in women's lives.

I would suggest then, that feminism consider contemporary ambivalence, and the shifting boundaries of gender difference and identities in fashion, as anti-structural `liminal' phenomena.

> Liminality is a threshold state `betwixt and between' existing orders. Liminars... are between identities. In politics, they are between allegiances. This state is marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction, yet it is from this disorder that new orders arise... The recognition of the liminal marks the conscious differentiation of self and other... The differentiation of subject and object, self and other, requires both an object of likeness and an object of difference. Liminars provide an object that is like, though demonstrably other than, the subject. They thus provide an object with which the subject can identify even as it differentiates itself. This triadic differentiation is decisive and enduring because it is abstract, turning upon the abstraction of criteria for identification and differentiation (Norton:1988:40).

Established orders of gender differentiation find themselves in constant fluctuation, beyond the limits of structuring principles. The constitution in difference of the self by the other and the other by the self, the other that is the self; the constitution of the individual by the collective and the collective by the individual, the individual that is collective, contributes to the dissolution of diametrical opposites into a state of ambivalence traced through ambiguity. Through each structuring of identity, ambivalent components are shown to be related, in Aristotle's terms, `as concave is to convex'.

Processes of gender identity and differentiation are therefore informed through eternally contradictory dynamics, and subject identities cannot be asserted as prefigurative in any sense, nor reduced to the simplistic movement of any singular biological, psychological or social force as has tended to be the case in many of the theoretical locations described herein. The claims of different feminist positions are,

of course, fundamentally important to contemporary feminist politics as the current configuration of political power tends to exclude `women' in every guise. But to make hierarchical claims to identity is simultaneously to exclude, to differentiate, to marginalise, to deny the possibility of contraindication, differance and ambivalence.

Ambivalence is a primary position from which a feminist politics and theoretical praxis might be articulated in an increasingly complex cultural context. The articulation of absence and silence alongside narrative, the articulation of the other as the self and the self as the other, the articulation of fluid boundaries and gendered subjects as contingent, arises from the politics of ambivalence as constituted through plurality of difference. Ambivalence as the source of social relations should be announced through a politics of ambivalence in which subjects are deployed not only through difference, but through differance; the tension between difference and the deferment of subject positions. Politics and political identity are always historically constructed and constituted in complexity, and the politics of ambivalence is triggered at points of multiple and emergent social identities in individual and collective subjects; a `war of position' in the Gramscian sense. The location of individuals at interpellated and contradictory junctures of identity, as different political subjects of identification at different times, in different contexts, in contingent circumstances, is necessarily a historically specific and contextualised process. No `political guarantee' is ever essentially inscribed in identity, because

> history has lodged on it the powerful, tendential organisation of a past. We cannot conduct this kind of cultural politics without returning to the past but it is never a return of a direct and literal kind. The past is not waiting back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented. It has to be narrativized. We go to our own pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact (Hall:1991:58).

The illumination of narrative histories, and their counterparts in absence and silence, is to emerge in the world of politics. For feminism, it is the acknowledgement of ambivalence as a component of any number of emerging histories, narratives and identities. It is the recognition of fluidity in gender and identity, and a search for an ambiguous and ambivalent political praxis which articulates the contingent boundaries of both gender and feminism. As with all identities, the politics of gender identities becomes problematic.

The goal of multiple praxis and politics is often presented in social science literature as a particularly `postmodern' phenomenon. Modernism, it is said, has served its purpose as an organising principle within the academy, and the social and cultural milieu has shifted both its impetus and orientation in social relations of difference and representation. In the following chapter, I want to explore the largely academic notion of a shift from modernism to postmodernism in both the organisation of social and cultural relations, and of sociological praxis; particularly in relation to the principle configurations of difference, ambivalence, contradiction, ambiguity, positionality and liminality that I have discussed above. The `postmodern moment' has important implications for feminist analysis in this sense as there are certain affinities between the postmodernist and the feminist. If the inception of feminist analyses of fashion, identities and differences are intrinsically ambivalent, then to what extent is postmodernism useful for feminism in this instance? How do postmodern forms of theorising articulate ambivalence? To what extent is the debate between modernism and postmodernism useful for ambivalent feminist praxis? The next chapter explores these issues, questions and problems in more detail.

CHAPTER FOUR

POSTMODERN FABRICATIONS

(1) THEORETICAL DILEMMAS

> Definitions define, determine, demark. They put an end to concepts and, in practice, to debates over their meaning. They establish boundaries to meaning. The boundaries set and secured in definition mark off one word, one name, one idea, from the others. They designate difference. They set the one apart from those surrounding it. Yet there is ambiguity in the interior. The province of meaning that the definition demarks is not empty or uniform. Within the word, the name, the idea, the identity, is ambiguity, ambivalence, contradiction, a question. The simple *nots* that separate this one from those surrounding it lapse at the border, and negation gives way to an equivocal affirmation.
>
> Anne Norton
> *Reflections on Political Identity*

Introducing the notion of postmodernism to the relationship between fashion and gender identity is something akin to creating the `three body problem' of chaos theory. The equation wherein two phenomena are in reaction is difficult enough in itself, and the addition of a third introduces infinitely more complex dynamics. Definition cannot, however, be assumed. Fashion cannot be connoted as an entirely separate entity to that of identity, the formation of social identities cannot be split from processes of theorisation, modernism cannot be delineated as monolithic and in opposition to postmodernism.

I want to suggest in this chapter that postmodernism, or more properly the academic **debate** between the protagonists of postmodernism and their adversaries who support modernism, obfuscates the useful exploration of ambivalence in theorising both

identity and fashion. It is at the point at which we consider notions of identity, when we examine the way in which individuals are created and transformed alongside the social system they have conceived, that the various (irrational) aspects of fashion's complex movements become concentrated. Identity becomes a unique dilemma in the theorisation of fashion as a modern phenomenon: individuals are increasingly defined through ambiguous social positions arising in the maelstrom of social changes characterising the capitalist and industrial age. Not only is the social identity of individuals equivocal in the sense that the structures of social life transmute at an ever accelerating pace, but it is also precarious in the sense that individuals as social beings are ambiguously situated inside and between opposing, ambivalent and contradictory social behaviours. According to the adherents of `postmodern' positions however, this conceptualisation of identity is grounded in a particular conceptualisation of time, space and social reality which is no longer necessarily applicable to the contemporary social universe in which we find ourselves. According to the postmodern argument, every facet of our social lives has changed from that era which might be characterised as `modernist'; and because ontological social reality has been transformed, it becomes appropriate to revise the epistemological premises on which our analysis of that society is based.

In this chapter, I will therefore consider the implications of the debate around modernism and postmodernism. The first discussion will review some of the most commonly identified components of modernism and postmodernism. Throughout this process, I want to suggest that the demarcation of these terms that arises from the imposition of such boundaries are extremely problematic, not only in the denotative sense, but also in the negation of ambivalence which, I believe, is at the centre of theoretical and lived relations. The second section explores the relationship between feminist theories and different `postmodern' theories of fashion, identity and cultural representation. Here, I want to peruse those arguments positioned under the rubric of the postmodern, and explore both the potentialities and difficulties associated with feminist appropriations of postmodernism in feminist analyses of identities and fashions. Finally, the closing section suggests that contingent, if troubled, connections might be made between feminisms and certain postmodernist positions, but that

ambivalence must always remain central in the analyses if feminism is to adequately respond to social and cultural indeterminacy.

MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY

The realm of `postmodern' theory is itself accused by some critics as being a mere intellectual fashion (surely a problematic epistemological point in the context of this argument which deserves elaboration in a more comprehensive text), which simply justifies the role of the intellectual in society. The identification (or invention?) of social trends is, after all, the substance of an intellectual's work (Pawley, in Featherstone:1988). The origins of various postmodernist theories however, have been grounded in the investigation of far wider cultural and social dynamics than purely intellectual concerns; postmodernist theorising has had eclectic scope, concerning itself with everything from the artistic field in music, art, literature and architecture, to the intellectual field in philosophy and anthropology, to name but a few. The space of social investigation is large to the extent that `postmodernism' defies conceptualisation as a coherent or unitary theoretical category.

Any differentiation between the `modern' and the `post' is, in any instance, dubious. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, the sociology of postmodernity, by virtue of its own analysis of knowledge, resists substantive categorisation into any classificatory system, claiming that a previously `technical discourse of professional philosophy... alongside which one could still distinguish that quite different discourse of other academic disciplines...' has fundamentally changed; today there is writing which is called, simply, `theory', and such `theoretical discourse is also to be numbered among the manifestations of postmodernism' (Jameson:1983:112). Secondly, there remains considerable debate within the disciplines of social science regarding the nature and extent of postmodern thought; there is argument as to whether postmodernism exists at all, and if it does, the exchange extends to how it might be characterised. Some define the postmodern as a mode of understanding, others as sets of specific social practices. Some argue that the postmodern is about cultural style, while others attest

that changes in economy, industry and technology have marked the postmodern moment.

The explosion of debate that postmodernity has stimulated is no doubt beneficial for the discipline; the question of whether postmodernity constitutes a `crisis' in theory ironically answers itself in the flurry of academic literature that has been produced in its advent. One of the more important consequences of `postmodern thinking' however, has been to prompt a reevaluation of both the subject matter that is studied by social science, and an assessment of the conceptual means through which these social subjects are identified and analysed. Postmodernity has challenged some of the most fundamental conceptual tools of the sociological discipline, so that class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and identity (amongst others) have all undergone serious reconsideration; and the theoretical (re)positionings consequently argued have been similarly intense. It is then in the exploratory and dialectical nature of social investigation that theoretical propositions originating in **reaction** to established thinking tend to exaggerate singular characteristics of that paradigm. Thus, different theorists of postmodernity have been inclined to caricature stances which are perceived to be modernist in tendency. Similarly however, critics of postmodernity have inflated particular aspects of postmodern thought at the expense of others. Some concentrate on an analysis and critique of those points which appear to be most beneficial for the defense of their own position, or dismiss postmodern arguments as apolitical and meaning-less. Neither practice is particularly useful in the formation of ongoing theoretical praxis, and I want to suggest that these aspects of the debate between modernism and postmodernism are a source of confusion and obstruction in the understanding of ambivalence in both identities and fashions.

THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE

As with any other theoretical position in the social sciences, the fundamental premises of postmodernism concern the nature of social reality, and the means by which we have knowledge of that social reality; ontology and epistemology for those

philosophically inclined. Postmodern arguments therefore primarily include assertions concerning the way in which ontological reality and social experience have progressively changed in very dramatic ways over the twentieth century, and secondly incorporate theoretical propositions as to the most appropriate means through which social science might adequately conceive of and explain continuities and changes in social life. This section provides a brief overview of ways in which the debate between modernity and postmodernity has been characterised by various sociologists, and by no means purports to be exhaustive. I rather want to draw attention to those aspects of the debate which appear the most generally accepted by different writers, aspects which are particularly problematic if the ambivalence of social subjectivities, identities and discourses are considered as fundamental in the deployment of power across social and cultural processes.

According to Featherstone (1988:197-198), the generic terms `modernity' and `postmodernity' suggest an epochal shift, a transformation which implies a temporal rupture in social relations. Modernity is generally held to denote the social systems that came into being with the Renaissance era, transforming the relationships of `Antiquity' to a social order characterised by increasing economic and administrative rationality, and the differentiation of social relationships. These in turn provided the mechanisms for the establishment of the modern capitalist/industrial nation-state. The formation of identity in this historical context takes place through those processes of differentiation in nation-states which

> laud and enforce the ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural *homogeneity*. They are engaged in incessant propaganda of *shared* attitudes. They construct *joint* stubborn memories...They preach the sense of *common* mission, *common* fate, *common* destiny (Bauman:1991:64).

In modernity, there not only exists a structural differentiation in empirical `reality', but the very concepts used to delineate and describe those realities are the product of similar epistemological differentiation. Dichotomous models are presented to differentiate social phenomena. The social thus becomes differentiated from the spiritual, the natural from the cultural, the theoretical from the aesthetic, and so on (Lash:1990). This results in a certain epistemological and ontological realism, the

thesis that ideas can present a reflection of `reality', and that this separate and distinct reality in turn produces certain normative parameters which may then determine the validity of the theory informing it: it becomes `self-legislating'. In terms of the construction of identities, this implies a particular system of representation. As the cultural is separated from the social in this paradigm, it is possible to conceive of relationships between phenomena as pure representations. One entity both reflects and represents another entity in entirety. The construction of differentiated identity is unproblematic, as are the various cultural forms which represent it.

`Postmodernity', by contrast, signals an emergent epoch characterised variously as the `society of the spectacle' (Debord:1967/1987), the `post-industrial society' (Bell:1978), the media society, or consumer society. These conceptualisations stress the increasing role of information, communications and technology as central in

> the shift from a productive to a reproductive social order in which simulations and models increasingly constitute the world so that the distinction between the real and appearance becomes erased (Featherstone:1991:3).

Knowledge and truth become contested, and the foundationalist assumptions of philosophy and social science are rejected as totalising `meta-narratives' which have little relevance in a radically de-centred, fragmentary and mediated social existence. Postmodern theory revels in shattering previously well established boundaries between academic disciplines, and instead integrates a huge arena of different discourse and theory, to the extent that some have even questioned the continuing existence of the social as both the subject and object of study (Kellner:1988). Furthermore,

> a postmodern perspectivalist approach to knowledge (is) where the central anchor of the modern(ist) episteme - reason - is refused universal and transcendent status. Instead, postmodern thought develops a thoroughgoing epistemological politics which insists on the always embodied, localized nature of reason. Reason is always tied to the pragmatics and to the politics of the particularly contextualised nature of knowledge claims (Yeatman:1991:3).

`Modernism' in art and culture, as characterised by aesthetic reflexivity, ambiguity, paradox, simultaneity and montage, shifts to a paradigm of `postmodernism' which emphasises the collapse of boundaries between life and art, the devolution of distinction between high art and popular/mass culture, an eclectic fusing of various

stylistic codes and a concern with the constitution of culture as pure surface imagery - irony, pastiche and parody. The ephemeral, discontinuous and fleeting subjective experience of modernity mutates into the intense hyperreal, schizophrenic and stylistic sensations of the mediated postmodern world. Identities become an increasingly complex problem for the inhabitants of the postmodern scene, as image and reality, self and other become more difficult to differentiate: experience becomes ironic, nostalgic, imaginary.

As critics have noted however, emphasising the disjuncture between the modern and the postmodern in terms of an epochal shift,

> obscures the fact that the impulse informing the postmodern occasion is not fundamentally a chronological event in a developing plot but rather an inherent mode of human understanding that has become prominent in the present (de-centred) historical juncture (Spanos:1987:194).

Described in this way, postmodernity is constituted as the analytical description of a historically specific shift in the perception of time, reality and experience rather then simplistically being conceived as an epochal transformation in structural social relationships (Jameson:1984). Postmodernism is not a hegemonic condition, but rather co-exists temporally with other systems of perception and representation. Lyotard's (1971) notions of **discourse** and **figure** are relevant in this type of paradigmatic differentiation. The `modernist' ideal type of symbolic representation is hermeneutically oriented, whereas the `postmodern' is aesthetic; and a distinction may be made between modernity as a `discursive' moment and `postmodernity' as a `figural' moment in regimes of signification. The former modernist perception asserts the primacy of text over image; it places value on formal qualities of cultural artefacts; it rationalises culture; it prioritises meaning in cultural text; it perceives through the `ego' rather than the `id'; and it distances spectators from cultural objects. The latter postmodern perception in contrast, prioritises visual imagery; it juxtaposes disparate and banal cultural objects; it problematises rational views of culture; it questions the effect rather than the meaning of cultural forms; and it relies on a subject's immersion in desire for cultural objects (Lash:1990).

(2) THEORETICAL CONTINGENCIES

While any number of the propositions above might be demonstrated to be applicable in different social instances, they become problematic when social and cultural relationships are explored through the dynamics of identification.

Firstly, any construction of a definitive arena of theory, whether it be modernism or postmodernism, is exactly that - a construction - and as such has no a **priori** claim to a pregiven unity or a necessary fixity. The positions ascribed to postmodernism are also accredited to poststructuralism, and the two become conflated under the general auspices of the postmodern; even when the theoretical precepts of each differ quite dramatically, and the differences between them are attributed to these substantive and normative descriptions as variations on the same general theme. Postmodernism is often assumed to be synonymous with deconstructionism, and is just as often understood as a chaotic assemblage of cultural studies, Lacanian psychoanalysis, French Feminism, Foucaultian analysis as well as deconstruction (to denote only a few). The extent to which these positions interrogate each other, however, belies the fiction of their unity. Lacanian psychoanalysis is, in France, posited as alternative to poststructuralism, and many theorists characterised as postmodern explicitly reject that term.[1] The followers of Foucault and Derrida infrequently meet in a common philosophical space, Derrida's deconstructionism is only tenuously connected to French feminism through Cixous, even less through Irigaray, and the theories of these two latter scholars have been characterised as fundamentally opposed. To point out that many French feminisms are arrayed under a general rubric of social relations constituted in modernity and the role of the avant-garde is to render the parameters of definition in the debate between modernism and postmodernism highly problematic (Butler:1992:4).

This association of `postmodernism' with a paradigmatic synthesis of thought is particularly ironic, in the sense that elements of thought associated with the

postmodern are concerned with challenging singular paradigms in which local and specific thought is marginalised or subordinated, and questioning `meta-narratives' which claim to speak in a universalising sense. In Butler's (1992) terms,

> this gesture of conceptual mastery that groups together a set of positions under the postmodern, that makes the postmodern into an epoch or a synthetic whole, and claims that the part can stand for this artificially constructed whole, enacts a certain self-congratulatory ruse of power. It is paradoxical, at best, that the act of conceptual mastery that effects this dismissive grouping of positions under the postmodern wants to ward off the peril of political authoritarianism. For the assumption is that some piece of the text is representational, that it stands for the phenomenon, and that the structure of `these' positions can be properly and economically discerned in the structure of the one (1992:5).

If postmodernism is somehow presumed a unity constructed through oppositional difference, even in its most ambiguous moments, then postmodern theorising is a distinctly `modern' signifying practice, which interrogates the very premises through which one might argue for or against the postmodern. Framing the debate in terms of social subjects who make some claim to knowledge under the representation of modernism as pitted against social subjects who make some claim to knowledge under the representation postmodernism, is to establish a social, cultural and intellectual space in which the ambivalence of subjective identities are denied. If identities are constituted through the simultaneity of different and sometimes opposing discourses, in the ambivalence and ambiguity of deferral in difference, then any position articulated is always constituted through that which it seeks to displace. Thus, elements of thought in different theories articulated as either modernist or postmodernist are always constructed through the absent presence of the other in each signifying instance. In consideration of ambivalence then, neither postmodernism nor modernism can be considered representational categories in the final sense, as each contains the fragment of the other. The textual themes and theoretical implications of the one are always echoed in relation to its constructed opposite. This becomes particularly apparent when considering the theorisation of fashion and identity in modernity and postmodernity. In the effacement of differences within and between positions, in a refusal of the specificity of different texts, in the exclusion of the other in adherence to the one, the categorical constructs become almost farcical in their representation of the other.

THE POST IN THE MODERN...

Several theorists have argued that the theme of fashion is the quintessential expression of modernity, a modernity which actually bears little resemblance to the representations established in the course of the academic debate for or against different post/modern positions. In the theorisation of fashion's relationship to modernism, modernity is held to be characterised as centrally concerned with new modes of experience and perception that emerged through the development of capitalism, and the exchange economies and metropolitan centres that accompanied the shift to a capitalist economy. In so far as modernity signals monumental changes in the social fabric, it becomes an epoch where `all that is solid melts into air' (Berman:1982:16). The experience of social life becomes discontinuous and fragmented, where relationships of time, space and causality become interrupted. The world is seen as fleeting, transitory and arbitrary, and social reality becomes `ever-present', where even novelty is transitory before it is new. The external world of modernity is in constant metamorphosis, to the extent that existence in modernity becomes a paradox wherein the eternal becomes the transitory or temporal, the only fixed social relationship becoming one of continual flux and change. Previous social experience had differentiated between fixity and change as separate social forces, but in the world of modernity, this dialectic collapses into a cycle of the `eternal recurrence of the eversame', where change and continuity become one and the same thing. Modernity is thus a condition or experience of the world in which traditional truths, absolute values, `natural' social roles and essential meanings are open to challenge and change.

> The concept `modernism', used as an umbrella term to indicate a wide variety of different currents in modern art and aesthetics, has been criticised for its lack of rigour. Yet it does suggest what is common to much of modern art: its oppositionalism and iconoclasm, its questioning of reality and perception, its attempt to come to grips with the nature of human experience in a mechanized `unnatural' world... (T)he word modernity attempts to capture the essence of both the cultural and the subjective experience of capitalist society and all its contradictions. It encapsulates the way in which economic development opens up, yet simultaneously undercuts the possibility both of individual self development and social cooperation. `Modernity' does also seem useful as a way of indicating the restless desire for change characteristic of cultural life in industrial capitalism, the desire for the new that fashion expresses so well (Wilson:1985:63).

I want to briefly discuss the work of both Georg Simmel and Elizabeth Wilson at this point, both to be specific regarding the reading of texts, and to demonstrate the ambivalent and interdependent relationship of different theories to each other (even when categorised through academic debate into oppositional polarities) in tracing the relationship between fashion as an ambivalent cultural form and identity as immanent.

The analysis of Georg Simmel (1904/1971) is useful in elucidating the way in which city life, and its relationship to fashion, forms the social consciousness of the individual's experience of modernity. Simmel saw society as an abstract term signifying the social interactions between real individual subjects, subjects who were constituted through social and cultural ambivalences. According to Simmel, the historical dialectic determining human society across different epochs was the dynamic tension between form and content **within** the individuals of particular societies. In any particular society, the individual must attempt to reconcile interactive polarities of behaviour which characterise the human condition. These dualities create an essential flux in subjective existence, a tension between stability and change, compliance and resistance, conformity and individualism; the subjective tensions within the individual being necessarily limited in the objective social forms in which they can be expressed. In Simmel's argument, the forces of modernity have produced individuals who are constantly seeking to establish their individuality through expression of their inner subjective experience, but at the same time are constrained by the regulating and integrating social organisation of the city and economy in which they live. The irrational and the emotional become subsumed to the rational and instrumental, fostering `restless personalities' wholly immersed in acquisitive values which, paradoxically, negate rather than reinforce the process of individuation (Frisby:1985)[2].

Simmel's analysis identifies fashion as a social phenomenon which encompasses both uniformity and differentiation as a precondition of its own existence. According to Simmel, fashion had generally existed within social classes as a measure of differentiation amongst members of similar economic and social location. The weakening of class barriers and the rise of social mobility across class boundaries in

the new metropolis however, served to increase the rapidity of fashion changes. This was an exacerbated form of the fundamental historical dialectic between opposite tendencies to conform to a social group, and simultaneously to differentiate oneself from others. Fashion was the means therefore, through which the increasingly acquisitive personalities of the modern world might differentiate themselves from their peers in the theatre of the metropolitan streets. However fashion, by its own dynamics, is ultimately equalising because although fashions exist within groups, they also spread from one social group to another. Thus, individuals follow fashions which differentiate themselves from other members of their group, but which nevertheless ensure conformity both in opposition to other social groups, and through the general commodification of fashion within the capital exchange economy:

> There not merely emerges an article somewhere that then becomes fashionable, rather articles are produced for the express purpose of being fashionable. At certain intervals of time, a new fashion is required a priori and there now exist creators and industries which exclusively carry out this task. The relationship between abstraction as such and objective-social organisation is revealed in the indifference of fashion as a form to any significance that lies in its specific content - and in its increasingly more determined transition to social-productive economic structures (Simmel, in Frisby:1985:97).

Fashion therefore prioritises the `form' over the `content' of social life in much the same way as other subjective and cultural elements of modernity are expressed. The abstract commodification of fashion as a cultural form emphasises the `constant element of change' - the endless repetition of commodities which establish an illusion of the present as eternal. Individuals seek to differentiate themselves, but do so through common means, in a common framework, through commodities which are ultimately similar and recurring. The present becomes a fragmentary glimpse of a simultaneous past and present in one infinite moment: As Simmel notes, `fashion possesses this peculiar quality, that every individual type to a certain extent makes its appearance as though it intended to live forever' (1904/1971:319). Or, in Barthes' terms, `Every new fashion is a refusal to inherit' (1967:273). This is ultimately illusory however, as the definition of fashion as a cultural expression of modernity is necessarily transitory and ephemeral. The dialectical tensions within the form of fashion therefore contain elements of its own destruction.

> This would suggest a continuous competition-induced self-destruction of fashion, inevitably arising out of the basic social relation of the interplay between performers and spectators. At first, fashion is a mark of distinction; but through the medium of approval, without which it cannot exist, through the competition, which immediately follows approval, in the interchange of the roles of spectators and performers and through the ambition to rival the creators of fashion the distinction gradually disappears and becomes commonplace. The average process runs a regular course and at the end a fashion disappears as suddenly as it appeared. Hence the reputation of levity that fashion has acquired, although the term is not quite correct. For this apparent levity hides a restless, consuming death-wish, which is realized at the precise moment when a fashion has reached its climax... (Konig:1973:123-124).

In Wilson's (1985) argument, the ambivalence, the `double face' of fashion is expressed in its character as a distinctly `modern' phenomenon: and Wilson draws out the relationship between fashion and modernity in the urban, industrial and capitalist world through parallel ambiguities that are created and transformed through their interactive development.

> We live as far as clothes are concerned a triple ambiguity: the ambiguity of capitalism itself with its great wealth and great squalor, its capacity to create and its great wastefulness; the ambiguity of our identity, of the relation of self to body and self to the world; and the ambiguity of art, its purpose and meaning. Fashion is one of the most accessible and one of the most flexible means by which we express these ambiguities. Fashion is modernist irony (1985:14).

It is this idea of social experience fraught with ambiguity which problematises the whole construction of identities in `modern' accounts of fashion. The nature, or more properly `culture' of subjective experience within modernity signals the ambiguity inherent not only in social relationships, but within individuals themselves. Modernity creates fragmentation, dislocation and ambiguity, a precarious sense of self which is expressed in paradoxical means through fashion. The urban (urbane?) personality strives for social identity through originality and individuation, but ultimately derives differentiation through social structures and symbols, such as those available through commodities, which are common to all. Simultaneously conformity is specifically structured through the range of individual options articulated by different groups of people in given historical periods.

Wilson's argument is particularly interesting on the various divergences and continuities between `modern' and `postmodern' thought. She repeatedly asserts that postmodern analysis is inadequate in providing a comprehensive account of the way

in which fashion manoeuvres to construct and transform our social reality. On the one hand, she argues that

> (i)t would be possible to leave fashion as something that simply appears in a variety of distinct and separate `discourses', or to say that it is itself merely one among the constellation of discourses of post-modernist culture... Such extreme alienation `dercalizes' modern life, draining from it all notion of meaning (1985:11).

On the other hand however, Wilson acknowledges that there are important elements in the dynamics of fashion which postmodern explanations are particularly cognisant of:

> Fashion does appear to express such a fragmented sensibility particularly well - its obsession with surface, novelty and style for style's sake highly congruent with this sort of post-modernist aesthetic... Postmodernism, with its eclectic approach to style...[is] especially compatible with fashion; for fashion, with its constant change and pursuit of glamour enacts symbolically the most hallucinatory aspects of our culture, the confusions between the real and the not-real, the aesthetic obsessions, the vein of morbidity without tragedy, of irony without merriment, and the nihilistic critical stance towards authority, empty rebellion almost without political content (1985:11/63).

This argument illustrates admirably the epistemological point of departure towards a theory of ambivalence which moves beyond the current framework of contention over monolithic categories of modernism and postmodernism. The characteristics Wilson employs to delineate the postmodern are, firstly, too general to indicate which **specific** `postmodernism' is being argued against, and are, at the same time, aspects present to some degree in the characterisation of the modern as fleeting, ephemeral, contradictory and ambivalent. Postmodernism is held up as a monolithic category of thought which is in direct contrast and opposition to the modern, but which is conceived as an entirely separate entity rather than an interdependent construct, related in the slide of meaning in difference. Here, I am not trying to suggest that different theories of either modernity or postmodernity are interchangeable in any way, nor that they are necessarily compatible in any final or ultimate sense. Rather, I want to suggest that the constructions are interrelated, and it is a dubious exercise at best to argue for one or the other when the first is predicated on the articulation of the other. The primary project is not to suggest that the terms are inadequate and so should not be used (as I have argued sociologists suggest with other theoretical constructs), nor necessarily to fix any ultimate meaning to either category through

which their components might be readily understood (which has also been proposed). The task is rather to disturb the boundaries of meaning, to open the terms of resignification in the proliferation of meaning, to recognise that this meaning-in-difference is a relationship of identities-in-process, and as a relationship might be reconfigured. It is to apprehend that any theoretical foundation is necessarily a site of political struggle. Every foundational principle which social theory is compelled to articulate in the course of its explanation is the simultaneous expression of its own challenge. The politics of plurality and difference therefore entails identifying the contingent juncture where foundations are posited in order to open the site of meaning for multiple and unexpected reworkings of the terms by which it is articulated. The political takes place, is enabled, in these moments of resignification. Some might argue that this is a particularly postmodern project (depending of course upon the configurations of different identities, meanings and power through which the critic is perceiving), and it may be defined as such. It might also, however, especially in consideration of Simmel and Wilson's analysis, be defined as modern. Any resolution to these theoretical dilemmas will not emerge until the terms of the debate are challenged to the point where new meanings, new identities, new political tensions emerge.

...AND THE MODERN IN THE POST

While discussing above Simmel's configuration of identity and fashion dynamics, the ongoing ambivalence of differentiation and conformity, the simultaneous action and constraint of cultural commodification was a fundamental premise. This process of de-differentiation, a similarity through the signals of consumption, is a similar theme in many `postmodern' accounts. The argument may certainly not be considered the same - especially when recommending specificity in consideration of the theoretical text being argued - but is nevertheless an instance of theoretical ambivalence, an opportunity to press the boundaries of the terms `modern' and `postmodern'.

Jean Baudrillard (in the wake of McLuhan (1967)) argues a position which Kaplan (1988) refers to as `commercial' or `co-opted' postmodernism; and which `characterises culture in a new stage of multinational, multiconglomerate consumer capitalism and technologies which blanket culture and radically alter subjectivity' (1988:4). According to Kaplan, commercial postmodern arguments (a necessarily contentious and multiple definition in itself, but one whose differentially constituted meaning must needs be explored elsewhere) have an almost exclusive monopoly of the specific theorisation of fashion as a cultural commodity, and as such have been influential in establishing conceptualisations of the individual's struggle with fashions and identities in an increasingly ambivalent commodified cultural context.

In his influential critical work *The Mirror of Production* (1973), Baudrillard maintains that `... in Marx's time, the commodity form had not at all attained its generalised form, and has had a long history since Marx' (1973:117). According to Baudrillard, the historical placement of marxist thought precludes a comprehensive understanding of capitalism, as the development of capital has continued since the time of Marx. Baudrillard proposes then, that in order to analyse contemporary logics of economic process,

> one preserves the fundamental form of the Marxist critique of political economy but forces its content to break out beyond that of material production alone... (S)ince Marx, there has been an expansion of the sphere of productive forces, or better, of the sphere of political economy... Something in the capitalist sphere has changed radically, something Marxist analysis can no longer respond to. Hence, in order to survive it must be revolutionised... (1973:117).

Baudrillard's argument is that **commodity exchange** has exploded to the extent that contemporary capitalist exchange processes cannot be understood with reference to the logics of use or exchange value. Within the current dynamics of capital, the analysis of economic discourse explaining capitalism must be undertaken through a logic of sign value; a political economy of the sign. Consumption rather than production now provides the dominant mode through which economic activity is generated and executed. The cumulative growth of monopolistic capitalism has resulted in a system of accumulation in which the signification of uses, needs and cultural value are manipulated (through the marketing of diversity, affluence and

heterogeneity) to such an extent that there exists a `monopoly of the code' of signification. Signifiers become existent only in and of their relationship to each other, without any necessary reference to the empirical `commodities' of Marx's theorisation. In this system, Baudrillard maintains that exchange driven by consumption should be analysed with regard to a logic of difference, in which the status of any particular cultural object is as a sign, determined through its relationship with other signs, rather than through reference to an ultimate empirical form. The relationship of representation implodes, and the value of an object therefore lies in its differential signification.

> The form sign describes an entirely different organisation: the signified and the referent are now abolished to the sole profit of the play of signifiers, of a generalised formalisation in which the code no longer refers back to any subjective or objective `reality', but to its own logic. The signifier becomes its own referent and the use value of the sign disappears to the benefit of its commutation and exchange value alone. The sign no longer designates anything at all...All reality then becomes the place of a semiurgical manipulation of a structural simulation (1973:128).

Baudrillard used the term hyperreality to denote the contemporary epoch in which the cultural object has become an abstraction of signification, which is more real than the object itself. In hyperreality, `(s)igns precede value and value confers reality. Sign, value and reality become indistinguishable...' (Arnoux:1990:9). In order to establish discursive value, reference must be made to relational signs that are simulations of reality. In the dynamics of contemporary market consumption, the signs consumed are considered real only in so far as they conform to a preceding model of signs; the third order of simulacra - the relationship between the real and the simulation - historically instigated with the `neo-capitalist cybernetic order' (Kellner:1988:244). Heteroconsumers consume heterogeneous significations within a structural code of the western `neocapitalist' market that is globally hegemonic and totally manipulative.[3] Within the hegemony of the sign, human beings become processers of significations - people, their subjectivities and their identities become signified according to preceding models of sign value. Struggle over culture, identity and difference become part of the global consumption of simulated realities.

> The market method consists in selecting symbols of identity from the large pool of goods on offer... For virtually every projected self, there are purchasable signs to express it (Bauman:1988:63).

For Baudrillard, this is specific in fashionable forms.

> The logic of difference cuts across all formal distinctions. It is equivalent to the primary process and to the dream work: it pays no heed to the principle of identity and non-contradiction... Fashion is one of the more inexplicable phenomena so far as these matters go: its compulsion to innovate signs, its apparently arbitrary and perpetual production of meaning - a kind of meaning drive - and the logical mastery of its cycle are all in fact of the essence of what is sociological. The logical processes of fashion might be extrapolated to the dimension of `culture' in general - to all social production of signs, values and relations (Baudrillard:1972/1981:79).

No matter how the ritual cycle of fashion might be conjecturally extended to culture in the generic sense however, it continues to have very specific relationships with individual subjects, and particularly with their bodies and sexuality.

Drawing on Barthes' model of three different modalities in the relationship between abstract fashion bodies and real fashion bodies[4], Baudrillard extends the analysis to include an historical account of the way in which bodies have modelled fashions. Initially, the amateur models of fashion eventually gave way to mannequins; in the postmodern scene, each woman has become the mannequin, being exhorted to relate to her body as an investment in style and fashion. This corresponds to historical evolution of fashion as a cultural form. Originally, fashion was a marginal phenomenon in the early stages of capital. As it began to integrate different cultural spheres through the political economy of the market, fashion remained the privilege of the dominant cultural class. In the mediated age,

> fashion becomes a general way of life and no sphere escapes its logic: it has its own form of negativity[that which it defines as what it is to be not to be in fashion], becomes its own signified [as does production in the age of reproduction], and in the final state, just as it becomes universal, it disappears as a specific sphere; everything becomes fashion (Gane:1991:106).

Furthermore, Baudrillard maintains that this simulated reality is, ultimately, the negation of its own image of reality - its own pretentious simulacrum of `beauty'.

> (T)his `beauty'... has nothing to do with the fashion cycle... Truly beautiful, definitively beautiful clothing would put an end to fashion. The latter can do nothing but deny, repress and efface it - *while conserving, with each new outing, the alibi of beauty*.Thus fashion continually fabricates the `beautiful' on the basis of a radical denial of beauty, by reducing beauty to the logical equivalent of ugliness. It can impose the most

> eccentric, dysfunctional, ridiculous traits as eminently distinctive. This is where it triumphs - imposing and legitimizing the irrational according to a logic deeper than that of rationality (Baudrillard:1972/1981:79).

One might take issue with Baudrillard at this point over his conceptualisation of `beauty'. His argument is reminiscent of the marxist cultural critique of the Frankfurt school (particularly emphasising his intellectual debt to Marcuse), or Veblen, and his grasp of fashion condemns it along with the other detritus of capitalist ideological consumerism in a similar argument to that of Veblen. This view grants no space for contradiction or pleasure, and is somewhat deterministic in its reading of fashion as `false consciousness'. The clear implication of the `true beauty' that exists in opposition to the fashion cycle, is that there is a generalised or `authentic' standard of a beauty against which fashion might be judged.

Baudrillard's argument concerning the construction of individual identity through fashion centres on the heteroconsumption of cultural commodity forms. Gane reads Baudrillard as arguing that the consumerist ideologies resulting from this heteroconsumption of cultural signifiers results not in an emancipatory impulse or `freedom' in diversity, but rather

> consumption ideologies represent a blockage, a mask, not of change but of the inhibition of change, just as democratic ideology can be read as a compensatory order for the continued existence of real inequalities. So, in opposition to dominant myths, consumption plays its function in the process of social integration as hierarchy, it restores actual inequality against the modern egalitarian social fantasy (Gane:1991:78).

With regard to the construction of subjective identity through fashion then, and the way in which the self construction of identity is mediated through the hegemony of sign value in cultural symbols such as fashion, Baudrillard's `postmodernist' theory is both analytically radical in its perception of the silence behind the ideology - the space of meaning difference in which significations might be reconfigured - and problematic in the sense that the experiential ambiguity and ambivalence of social and cultural forms - the point of tension at which identity-as-immanent is recognised as simultaneously different and like - is obscured. Like Lyotard (1979/1984), Baudrillard presents a paradigm which is at once a theoretically comprehensive meta-narrative, but also problematic in the sense that the all pervasive nature of the political economy

of the sign leaves little room for radical strategies of reconfiguration in subversion of it. If all forms of political statement of identities are necessarily constructed through the manipulation of cultural simulacra, then there is no escaping the constitution of identities or actions by hyperreal forms of heteroconsumption - any political identities or actions are necessarily a support for, rather than a subversion of, the hyperreal system.

In this general sense, it may nevertheless be argued that Baudrillard's theory, at least at its points of interjacence with fashion and identity, provides a conceptualisation of the regimes of signification and accumulation that identifies the most extreme and nihilistic aspects of our social order.

> Baudrillard's is a yuppie political economy, premised on a model of an affluent consuming public... Baudrillard's view of consumer culture reduces the human subject to the victim, the uncritical recipient of signs and messages which seem to emanate from some supra-human realm (Tomlinson:1990:20).

It prioritises the role of consumer capitalism in society, privileging the implosion of cultural and commercial value. In doing so, it places social subjects in fixed positions. Cultural symbols are `distinctive' significations of status which are explicitly acknowledged as creating a social hierarchy.

At the same time, however, Baudrillard's theory tends to marginalise the ambivalence of social and theoretical life. As Bauman (1991a) notes, the danger with theory is its capacity to undermine radical intellectual values through failing to utilise these values in practice; in the context of the present argument, through failing to **preserve** junctures of ambivalence, the points of ambiguity at which a political tension is maintained rather than effaced by an endless differential proliferation which becomes entirely relative when placed as a foundation for theory. Leaving aside questions regarding the misinterpretation of Baudrillard's arguments by different authors (especially in his use of exaggeration and hyperbole as an extremely effective theoretical tool in pushing any argument or conclusion to its limits (Gane:1991:106)), problems remain as to the efficacy of Baudrillard's particular foundational arguments which tend to become closures rather than sites of struggle.

Theorists such as Arthur Kroker and David Cook (1987) are similarly proponents of a position which privileges the implosion of meaning in a commodified postmodern nightmare of excremental culture; panic scene, panic sex and panic philosophy. Like the work of Baudrillard, this position does alert analysts to the peculiar characteristics and contradictions of the late capitalist condition, particularly the way in which cultural artefacts are commodified and mediated. At the same time however, their analysis of fashion can lead to a metanarrative which tends to ignore contradiction, or preclude ambivalent analysis through the invocation of death and burnout.

In this vein, Gail Farschou (1988) has offered an analysis of fashion which centres on the production of fashion as a cultural form, and is consequently

> fed by all of capitalism's incessant, frantic, reproductive passion and power. Fashion *is* the logic of planned obsolescence - not just the necessity for market survival, but the cycle of desire itself, the endless process through which the body is decoded and recoded, in order to define and inhabit the newest territorialized spaces of capital's expansion. A line of escape at one moment, fashion is recaptured in the network of images the next; frozen in the mirror of the mediascape, we gaze forever at our suspended moment of flight (1988:78).

In this, as in Baudrillard's and Kroker and Cook's analysis of postmodern culture, the daily practice of consumption is overshadowed and overpowered by meta-theoretical abstraction. Farschou invokes Jameson's schizophrenic sublime, Debord's `spectacle', and Baudrillard's simulacra to sustain an analysis which is at once theoretically perceptive in its consideration of the relationship between the object, the subject and desire, and is also theoretically ambiguous in its polemic around fashion:

> The signs of absence multiply like the snakes on Medusa's head... the absence of absence... the depressing apperception of endless sameness. The obsessional meaning-effect over-determines itself, swallows its own tail in a circle of disembodied power. Every time we grasp a signification, it is substituted by another, which only adds to the collection of objects, but takes us nowhere in time or space. The death instinct, an overpowering odour, beckons (1988:89).

While fashion is certainly a universal and continuous process of meaning production in which consumers participate through the ongoing collection of fashionable objects of desire, there is little to suggest that there is `endless sameness' in the eclectic and heterogeneous styles visible on the contemporary scene. The meanings produced are

not only those of the producers of fashion, but also those of the consumer; and while dominant meanings are disseminated hegemonically, individuals are also active in the production of their own identities. Any evidence to support the claim that everybody is going `nowhere in time or space' is noticeably absent. The metaphor of death is poetically invoked in the final phrase, and echoes the thematic `death of the subject' (Heller:1990) theorised in different `postmodern' texts. In this context, the phrase contains no analytical explanation for its purpose or function, no recognition of ambivalent desires, only of the one. The cycles of fashion are often likened to the death wish or instinct[5] and exploration of this theoretical connection may certainly offer some useful sociological insights. Farschou however, effectively uses it to foreclose argument (Kaiser:1990:14).

Julia Emberly begins `The Fashion Apparatus and the Deconstruction of Postmodern Subjectivity' (1988) with an acknowledgement of fashion's eclectic scope, and maintains an interesting deconstructivist argument around fashion's relationship with the body, with colonisation, with global capital and with discursive subjectivities. Her conclusion though, is that fashion itself produces the `anti-fashion subject', and she pursues an argument which again results in appeals to the death wish as a closure:

> the subject bears the weight of a heterogeneous and multiple explosion of styles. The result, one could imagine, would be the final collapse and implosion of the body, burnt-out from the pressures of the post-modern pace. The desire for closure emerges as a desire for death where death, itself,... has come to be our lifestyle. To be fixed within the confines of one, single identity, and to desire immortality through the perpetuation of an image is, in the final instance, to be condemned to a living death (1988:59).

The `commercial' arguments discussed here bear similar themes to certain `modernist' arguments such as Veblen's, and implicity subscribe to the `false consciousness' thesis of culture and fashion. Not only is there an absence of space for contradiction or oppositionalism, but the analyses marginalise the roles of desire and ambivalence in the complex and problematic process of decoding meaning from consumer goods.

The fashion industry does, of course, produce homogeneous and expressionless clothing, even restrictive and debilitating fashions - all carefully marketed and advertised - as part of its ever accelerating need to create artificial demand and

obsolescence in the interests of capital. John Fiske (1989) however, argues that

> (s)uch a criticism, accurate as far as it goes, does not go far enough, for it fails to question why consumers, largely women, continue to want the new, if this desire is totally against their own interests. The 'cultural dope' theory would have to work enormously, not to say impossibly, hard to offer a final explanation of this. The desire to be up to date, and there is plenty of evidence that it is a common desire, cannot be created entirely by slick publicity, for advertising can only harness and shape socially created desires, it cannot create them from scratch (1989:40).

As Fiske suggests then, the `false consciousness' thesis, presented here in different forms but nevertheless identifiable in both the `modern' and the `postmodern', is problematic in conceptualising the relationship between fashion as a social and cultural artefact, and the ongoing subjective process of identity formation and recreation in the daily lives of individuals. In both theoretical and political terms, this theorising ultimately devalues the difference, ambiguity and ambivalence of those social groups on whose behalf they claim to speak, and whose sociopolitical well-being they purport to serve. Consequently, he argues for a modification in theorising the commodification of culture from the structuring principles of `metanarratives' (which are apparent here as they are in the discourses of modernity), to focus on particular practices in cultural consumption, and the way these relate to the individual as process.

> As our understanding of these totalising structures has become more sophisticated and more satisfying, so the realization is growing that this knowledge tells us only half the story, and of itself it can induce only a pessimistic elitism. It requires an often contradictory, sometimes complementary, knowledge of the everyday practices by which subordinated groups negotiate these structures, oppose and challenge them, evade their control, exploit their weakness, trick them, turn them against themselves and their producers (1989:33).

This `ambivalent' approach potentially offers a far more tenable medium through which problems of structure and practice might be addressed in the analysis of fashion. Binary or oppositional thinking only allows for a theoretical dialectic in which the thesis that fashion is oppressive stands in oppositional relation to the antithesis that fashion is pleasurable. No synthesis is either apparent or possible. A simultaneous consideration of each position however, allows a far greater theoretical scope to acknowledge both the debilitating and the pleasurable aspects of fashion without resorting to essentialist argument. Thus, it is theoretically possible to utilise

both `modern' and `postmodern' argument - as far as these boundaries of definition are maintained as open and ambivalent positions - in analysis of late capitalist media, fashion's colonising practices and in the appropriation of subcultural style by the fashion industry; while necessarily acknowledging the simultaneous caution theory offers against a simplistic and relativistic celebration of heterologic style. It is concurrently possible to reject any foundational analysis of social subjects in which immanence and ambivalence are ignored and the boundaries of meaning are closed (Kaiser:1990:16-17).

(3) POSTMODERNISMS AND FEMINISMS

What, then, might and ambivalent mode of analysis in this vein mean for feminist theory and practice? Kaiser et al. (1991) propose that symbolic interactionism is a suitably ambivalent mode of theorisation through which to approach questions of identities and fashions in an increasingly indeterminate cultural milieu. I would also argue that the shifting foundations of feminisms grounded in ambivalence, even through troubled and contested junctures, might be well served by certain specific theories that are presently ascribed to the postmodern. The purpose is to both establish and call into question theoretical foundations which are constructed within a matrix of difference and similarity, and through which the ambiguity of theories, cultures and identities might be negotiated.

Each feminism and each postmodernism has its points of definition, and thus also of exclusion and silence in the other. It has been argued that feminism has both congruencies with, and divergences from, both modernism and postmodernism as they are characterised in the debate outlined above. Feminism - as a movement organised around the specific concerns of `women' - has had a contradictory relationship to the tenets of modernity. Feminism, on the one hand like postmodernism, has been against the foundational postulates of enlightenment philosophy; the assumed neutrality and objectivity of social scientific investigation, the model of rationality and reason as a

`masculine' and historically specific paradigm, and the assumption of universal applicability in theoretical constructs which have been revealed as ethnocentric and class biased. Postmodernism and feminism have similarities in these critical points. On the other hand, however, feminism is a modernist emancipatory movement, a derivative of eighteenth and nineteenth century democratic revolutions. In this sense, strands of feminisms have sometimes become susceptible to the same types of criticisms that postmodernists make regarding contemporary theory and philosophy. While feminisms in general have not tended to evolve theory with universal applicability, some forms of feminism may nevertheless be charged with leaning towards essentialism and determinism in their theorisation of certain social phenomena. In attempting to locate the `cause' of women's oppression in society, and in doing so utilising a collective subject identity - woman/women - feminists have variously posited both western culture, biology and gender as determining and ahistorical.

At the same time, Wolff (1989) has argued extensively that the literature of modernity, as seen in writers such as Baudelaire (1863) and Benjamin (1973), predominantly describes the experiences of men, concentrating as it does on the modern transformation of the public sphere in politics, bureaucracy and city life, and the subjective consciousness associated with this. Different arguments in this vein propose that men have therefore had their modernity, and are now turning to a nihilistic and meaningless postmodernity in the political moment when marginalised groups are gaining their `subjecthood', coming to the forefront as political actors in the modern scene. Feminism should thus be sceptical of the shift to the postmodern.

These contentions on both sides are framed in terms of the characteristics ascribed to modernism and postmodernism throughout the `for and against' debate. I want to argue, however, that feminisms need to shift away from the question of whether modernism or postmodernism serves a prefigural subject of gender and feminism best, and rather concentrate firstly on the positionality of women within fluctuations between the modern and the postmodern in the field of culture. Secondly, feminisms need to identify the way in which subjects are constituted at the site of ambivalent

identities - at the point in which the difference and deferral of meaning and representation constitute the political - to renegotiate the foundations of their own philosophies through the multiplicity of meaning in difference. Any theoretical moments which inform this construction of ambivalent theory should be appropriated by feminisms, not despite their definitions as other or opposite, but because these definitions are open to political reconfiguration at points of ambivalence in identities, fashions and theories.

SOME POINTS OF THEORETICAL AFFINITY

Feminisms' most exciting encounters with postmodernisms in this sense are at those points of juncture in which theory

> involves a movement of culture and texts beyond oppressive binary categories', concentrates on texts which radically decentre the subject, insists on differential spectator positionalities, and focuses on texts where discourses are not hierarchically ordered (Kaplan:1988:4).

Both fashions and identities as ambivalent phenomena have been theorised as modern and post in different circumstances, most notably within the study of `popular culture' as the dominant form of movement in contemporary cultural artefacts. Several specific theories of `popular culture' begin to negotiate the ambivalence at the centre of social processes. These explanations of fashion and/in identities capture the immanence of identities, deflate the boundaries between theories and cultures, and struggle to invoke a form of theorising which emphasises meaning and opens the field of text to challenge and renegotiation.

There have been authors who have chronicled the cycles of fashion as popular culture in modernity, even conceived the `ideal' bodies of the 1920s as particularly `modernist' phenomena in their slimness and functionality; but at the same time, strands of what might be conceived as `postmodern' are discernable in modernist fashion. Peter Wollen (1987), for example, argues that there are strains of modernism - for example the spectacle of the Russian ballet at the turn of the century - which

anticipate the return to stylistic decoration and extravagant eclecticism of postmodernity. He theorizes connections between the Russian ballet and the punk movement, linking

> the radical excess of the last years of the *ancien regime* and that of postmodern street culture, complete with its own scenography, aggressive display, and decorative redistribution of bodily exposure (1987:28).

Most accounts of postmodernism in fashion, however, do not subscribe to the type of developmental account that Wollen presents, nor do they periodise postmodernity as the culmination of modernism or capitalism as such. They rather situate postmodernist fashion through comparison and metaphor of other `established' signals of the postmodern,

> most particularly the mode of bricolage, or the improvised juxtaposition of incompatible or heterogeneous fragments, often for ironic or parodic effect, as opposed to the principle of unity or `match' (Connor:1989:191).

Dick Hebdige, for example, has examined fashion in detail throughout his various analyses of subcultural practices. Here, the analysis begins not with abstract structuration, but rather with cultural practice as occasioned in the quotidian lives of individuals.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Hebdige presents case studies of different contemporary styles - of mods, of teddy boys, of glam rock, of reggae & rastafarian style and of punk - as the initial point of an argument oriented towards the delineation and explanation of `style' in culture. According to Hebdige, the way in which **commodities** are used to separate the subculture from the dominant is particularly distinctive to subcultural forms. Bricolage is necessarily an important component of contemporary style, in its structured improvisations in categorisation. The practice of bricolage

> carefully and precisely orders, classifies and arranges into structures the minutae of the physical world in all their profusion... The structures `improvised' or mode up as ad hoc responses to an environment, then serve to establish homologies and analogies... (Hawkes, in Hebdige:1979:105).

Style then, is a discourse of both conscious and unconscious communication and signification, in which the meaning of any commodity form is inverted and distorted. Fashion is a particularly evident symbol through which subcultural groups might ironise and subvert the original or dominant meanings of objects. Thus,

> the mods could be said to be functioning as bricoleurs when they appropriated another range of commodities (those of the Edwardian upper classes) by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original or straight meanings... In the same improvisatory manner,... Union jacks were emblazoned on the backs of grubby parka anoraks, or cut up and converted into smartly tailored jackets. More subtly, the conventional insignia of the business world - the suit, collar and tie, short hair, etc. - were stripped of their original connotations - efficiency, ambition, compliance with authority - and transformed into 'empty' fetishes, objects to be desired, fondled and valued in their own right (Hebdige:1979:104-105).

Hebdige is particularly concerned here with the role of punk in addressing the way in which popular cultural practices express modes of `postmodern' cultural resistance and plurality. Punk, and its `Dadaist' strategies in the politics of style, accelerate the sardonic juxtaposition of style elements to the extent that their expression ceases to be `style' in any expressive or cohesive sense. On the one hand, Punk is concerned with the disorder and confusion resulting from significant challenge to dominant boundaries of `race' or gender: on the other hand, the assemblage of punk confuses its own challenge; its expression is in constant fluctuation of subversion and fugitive instability, in a confusion of chronology and direction. Whereas

> the Teddy boy style says its piece in a relatively direct and obvious way, and remains resolutely committed to a 'finished' meaning, to the signified, to what Kristeva calls 'signification', punk style is in a constant state of assemblage, of flux. It introduces a heterogeneous set of signifiers which are liable to be superseded at any moment by others no less productive. It invites the reader to 'slip into"significance' to lose the sense of direction, the direction of sense. Cut adrift from meaning the punk style thus comes to approximate the state which Barthes has described as `a floating (the very form of the signifier); a floating which would not destroy anything but would be content simply to disorientate the Law' (1979:126).

Connor (1989) remarks that it is precisely at this point, when Punk as an oppositional style becomes a furious procession of empty bricolage style, that its own basis transforms into something very much like the accelerated parade of images which constitutes the dominant fashion culture (1989:193). Punk, for example, has been (albeit subtly) embraced by couture fashion (Evans & Thornton:1991), and is

one example of the way in which contemporary capitalist culture is able to appropriate, codify and sometimes even diversify subcultural fashion. Baudrillard clarifies this inherent paradox when, speaking of the transformed expression and function of `visibility', he maintains that theoretical schemes which rely on a binary oppositional model of dominance and suppression suggest that the dominant necessarily marginalises the suppressed form through rendering it `invisible'. The logical form of resistance for marginal groups is then an insistence on becoming visible: but this argument cannot then account for the way in which the commodity culture of fashion is increasingly premised on visibility as a commodity, on the image rather than the necessary production or consumption of actual commodities (Baudrillard:1983). Hebdige himself is aware of the predicament faced by subcultural challenge and its incorporation into dominant streams, and the way in which capitalism's media culture, rather than constantly recycling the same products, is actually energised by the novelty offered in oppositional cultures.

Is resistance necessarily based on a binary opposition which is both exclusive and inclusive? This would suggest that there are no indeterminables, no points at which one can be both or neither. To construct an opposition between the dominant `culture' and the marginal `subculture' in this way is to construct a theorisation which is both totalising and definitive, which does not recognise its own ambiguities nor those in experiential relations of process. Hebdige has nevertheless continued to search for a kind of `critical openness', particularly with regard to subcultural fashion; and in doing so, has continued to explore postmodern analyses and forms. In *Cut 'N' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (1987), for example, Hebdige explores the possibilities inherent in an eclectic mix of discourses, allowing popular cultural forms to be distilled amongst academic analysis. In *Hiding in the Light* (1988), Hebdige further explores the notion of postmodernism more explicitly, immersing the text in the rhythms and textures of mediated images. Fashion, rock music, television, magazines, advertising and lifestyle are all examined as constituents of the postmodern scene: Sid Vicious, David Byrne, The Face, scooter cycles and the ubiquitous punk, lie comfortably alongside Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Marshall McLuhan and Jurgen Habermas. This stylistic composition of theory and

practice in Hebdige's work is an expression of union, as well as an acknowledgement that

> the traditional semantic chains that once tied `truth' and `meaning' to the powers of an intellectual priesthood, and their exclusive institutions [the academy, the university, the scholarly journal, academic publishing] are snapping under the expansion of the contemporary world (Chambers, in Connor:1989:210-211).

Similarly, Hebdige is at pains to `deconstruct' some of the more polemical discourse around postmodernism arising from institutional academic thought. In `The Impossible Object: Towards a Sociology of the Sublime' (1987), Hebdige's analysis concentrates as much upon his neighbour's relationship with his Thunderbird automobile as it does upon the scholarly dominance of the Kantian sublime. Here then, he is less inclined to juxtapose academic thought and lived experience less for its novelty value, than for an attempt at unification: a

> weaving together of incommensurable levels, tones, objects... (in) an attempt to... alternate between on the one hand the personal, the confessional, the particular, the concrete, and on the other the public, the expository, the general, the abstract: to walk the flickering line between vertigo and ground (1987:44).

Of critical postmodernism, Hebdige concedes a postmodern strategy of negation; against totalisation, against teleology, and against utopia. He advocates a Gramscian oriented postmodernism tempered by some of the radical insights that various French postmodernist and poststructuralist schools of thought have provided contemporary cultural analysis. Thus, he advocates a postmodernism defined as

> a positive critical advance which fractures through negation (i) the petrified hegemony of an earlier corpus of `radical aesthetic' strategies and proscriptions, and/or (ii) the pre-Freudian unitary subject which formed the hub of the `progressive' wheel of modernisation and which functioned in the modern period as the regulated focus for a range of scientific, literary, legal, medical and bureaucratic discourses (1988:185).

This mode though, must be combined (and tempered?) with a combination of `conjectural analysis' and `strategic intervention' typified by the Gramscian approach to power and process. This relies on a concept of articulation which at the same time acknowledges the ideological relations creating historically specific subjectivities, and simultaneously insists upon real and concrete power dynamics in the shifting boundaries between conflicting cultures and interests. Thus, a type of postmodern

articulation of politics is

> a continually shifting, mediated relation between groups and classes, a structured field and a set of lived relations in which complex ideological formations composed of elements derived from diverse sources have to be actively combined, dismantled, bricolaged, so that new politically effective alliances can be secured between different fractional groupings which can themselves no longer be returned to static, homogeneous classes (1988:205).

Other theorists too, have attempted to engage in a critical postmodern discourse around fashion and popular culture, which is at once theoretically deconstructivist and concretely political. This type of postmodern analysis usually displays a concomitant concern with liberatory impulses, and has an interest in preserving a critical framework with which to deconstruct the complexities of fashion, style and consumer culture. John Fiske (1989), for example, makes an analysis of jeans, which while similar to that of Umberto Eco (1987) in its semiotic analysis, further situates the wearing of jeans in different social, economic and political contexts. The combination of semiology and the political use of image and meaning in the construction of multiple subjectivities serve to delineate important aspects of western identity formation in postmodern popular culture. Diana Simmonds (1990) offers a broad class analysis of the dynamics of democratisation within fashion, and considers the processes of meaning and consumption. Mike Featherstone (1991), in a meticulous analysis of consumption, aestheticisation and `lifestyle', concludes that a postmodern analysis of the processes of global consumption might offer

> the prospect of a unity through diversity which might lead to the realization of the dream of a secular ecumene, one which was based on the notion of humanity... (1991:147).

Feminist theorists have noted the rather glaring absence and silence of women in analyses such as Hebdige's, and have begun to engage a project in which `the postmodern' serves as an indefinite theoretical tool in the analysis of women, gender identities and fashion within ambivalent social and cultural dynamics.

Jennifer Craik (1984), for example, explores the connections between fashion as a commodified cultural form, configurations of desire in sexuality and the mapping of bodies and spaces in media, and presents an analysis which is distinctively feminist

in orientation. Kaja Silverman (1986) maintains an argument which, also feminist in origin, details the way in which culture interacts with capital and media to integrate the human body. In offering this analysis, she also stresses a `retro' approach to clothing and fashion, which she argues undermines the binary thinking and categorisation which dominates fashion culture. Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton (1989) document fashion as a primary discourse in the ongoing cultural construction of a feminine gender identity/difference which is precarious, open to redefinition, subversion, recodification; an ongoing process of experiment which requires experimental theory.

Angela McRobbie has engaged extensively with popular culture and consumption in women's lives, and in *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991a) examines the culture of teenage girls, their fashion, music, magazines, cosmetics and fiction. According to McRobbie, fashion and beauty are essential to the creation and maintenance of an ideology of adolescent femininity, and proposes that commodities are cultural signs which although fragmented and shifting, are nevertheless perceived as fixed and natural. Although McRobbie carefully delineates the process through which teenage girls' magazines attribute meaning to particular fashions within the context of consumerism, she simultaneously insists on an interactive and reflexive reading of these `texts' by the teenage girls consuming these images in their day-to-day lives. Considering the critical work of Elizabeth Fraser and Mary McLoughlin, McRobbie tempers her exposition of the ideological framework of adolescent femininity as structured by media, with

> a more fluid, more active and ultimately more engaged process of reading in which readers typically participate in the creation of textual meaning (1991a:142).

McRobbie is consistent in her analysis of fashion as both self-conscious and reflexive, at the same time as discursive and mediated. Although her analysis is `postmodern' in the sense that it draws on `postmodernist' theory, it also addresses the issues of the mediated self in consumer culture, the struggle over meaning and identities in individual lives and the aestheticisation of everyday life in fashion and youth subculture. McRobbie is nevertheless reluctant to simplistically embrace a

`postmodernist' paradigm for contemporary social theory. She suggests rather that postmodernity

> remains most useful, not as an anti-foundationalist philosophical concept whose basis lies in the disavowal of truth-seeking in intellectual enquiry, and which thus differentiates itself from the project of modernity, but as an analytical/descriptive category whose momentum derives from its cutting free from the long legacy of meanings associated with modernity. The term postmodernity indicates something of the scope and the scale of the new global and local social relations and identities set up between individuals, groups, and populations as they interact with and are formed by the multiplicity of texts, images and representations which are a constitutive part of contemporary reality and experience (1991b:3).

As becomes apparent with this definition, two fundamental problems arise when considering the form and expression of contemporary identity through the analysis of popular culture. Postmodernism, in its theorised destruction of the meta-narratives of modernity and the crisis in cultural authority, has been closely associated with the decline of the rational bourgeois subject of the enlightenment, and the simultaneous emergence of multiple subjectivities within and between individuals. Stuart Hall (1987, in McRobbie:1991b:4) has argued that the dissolution of the unitary consciousness of individuals in the West has allowed those in a marginal position to become centred. The fragmentation of the dominant has allowed the consolidation, however ephemeral, of the suppressed. These individuals are therefore in the paradoxical position of moving from the margins to the centre when the dominant is shifting to encompass the margins. In both of these arguments however, there is an absence of specificity. As McRobbie comments,

> (h)ave `we' become more fragmented than before? Can we specifically put a time and a place on the moment of fragmentation? Is fragmentation the `other' of humanity? Or is the *representation* of fragmentation coincidental with political empowerment and liberation?... The more important issue might be the one of who gets to be able to express their fragmentation, and who is able to put into words or images or sounds, the language of their private, broken subjectivities. In short who can contest, who can represent, and who gets to be listened to? (1991b:4-5)

Dynamics of power are played through the junctures of identities and subjectivities which are themselves constituting elements of any explanatory discourse. An appreciation of social, cultural and theoretical ambivalence therefore, entails not only the acknowledgement of experiential ambiguity, but the incessant contradictions in the terms through which we explain this. As Butler (1992) argues,

> (i)t seems that theory posits foundations incessantly, and forms implicit metaphysical commitments as a matter of course, even when it seeks to guard against it; foundations function as the unquestioned and the unquestionable within any theory. And yet, are these 'foundations', that is, those premises that function as authorizing grounds, are they themselves not constituted through exclusions which, taken into account, expose the foundational premise as a contingent and contestable presumption. Even when we claim that there is some implied universal basis for a given foundation, that implication and that universability simply constitute a new dimension of unquestionability (1992:7).

Beyond the debate between modernism and postmodernism (not necessarily out of it, or separate from it) are feminist struggles to establish means of theorising identities in fashions, while simultaneously questioning their own modes of analysis and philosophical premises. Fashions and identities are constructed through ambivalent relationships, but these ambivalences are neither eternal nor determining; in social practice they do not degenerate into limitless dissolution, nor do they preclude the unambiguous social location of individuals. The task must be, therefore, to develop a framework which addresses the ongoing reconstruction of identities and fashions at points of ambivalence, while at the same time recognising that attention must be given to cultural and political forces which shape individuals' lives in unambiguous and emphatic ways. Before this kind of theoretical resolution is reached, however, the notion of ambivalence should remain a central consideration in the study of fashions and identities.

CHAPTER FIVE

FASHIONING IDENTITIES

Scholars of society have long recognised the import of identities as foundational aspects of society. Most recently however, the focus of analysis has shifted from a historically positioned (predominantly enlightenment) definition of the unified, coherent and rational individual subject, towards a more fluid and fractional conception of interpellated social subjects; which is itself, no less, a product of particular contemporary historical and cultural circumstances. Identity is seen (provisionally, and not without significant debate) as emergent, as narratively positioned amongst any number of social and cultural discourses which divide and reposition the subject in ambivalent and ambiguous relation to an infinite number of social processes. There are junctures at which relationships of power position social subjects in social hierarchies arranged around dominant or normative material and ideological practices; especially in respect of the construction of difference along lines of gender, class, age or ethnicity. At the same time, however, social subjects are never finally structured into fixed social systems. Not only do cultural and political configurations of power fluctuate subtly in continuous reconfigurations of historical contexts, but social subjects themselves are never singularly constituted by any one set of social interactions or relationships. The junctures of identities and fashions therefore act as `nodal' sites of interplay between difference, meaning and power (Laclau and Mouffe:1985:142).

Fashions, as specific cultural processes, images and artefacts, are sites within which the tensions of identity played out. Forms of fashion are constructed through the

ambivalence at the heart of identities; and greater heterogeneity and complexity in social and cultural life necessarily increases the potential ambivalences present within the interactions and interdependencies of the psyche, the body, the mind - the **self** and its social influences. Within this formative process fashions themselves become more plural, more relative, more open to contestation and mutation. Fashion is typically an attempt to resolve the identity ambivalences of fashion's own making in the production of `looks' through which individuals might be definitively categorised. Each solution or compromise in the effort to reshape individuals' `virtual identities' (Goffman:1959) eventually contributes to further ambivalences within newly reconfigured social contexts. Fashion's expression of identities are therefore only ever an emergent, `virtual reality', formed and crossed by distinctive but transient enactments of identification. Thus,

> (f)ashion elicits an ambivalent response and that has to do with an ambivalence that runs deeper and is more tightly embedded in fashion itself. Fashion acts as a vehicle for fantasy. The utopias both of right and left, which were themselves fantasies, implied an end to fantasy in the perfect world of the future. There will, however, never be a human world without fantasy, which expresses the unconscious unfulfillable. All art draws on unconscious fantasy; the performance that is fashion is one road from the inner to the outer world. Hence its compulsiveness, hence our ambivalence, hence the immense psychological (and material) *work* that goes into the production of the social self, of which clothes are an indispensable part (Wilson:1985:246).

I have argued in this dissertation that traditional social scientific treatments of fashion have tended to marginalise the extent to which dress and fashion serve as a `visual metaphor' for the assemblage of identities, a means for `registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities' (Davis:1992:25). It is thus being increasingly recognised that tendentially univocal approaches to the movement of fashion cycles arising from primarily class, status and market driven analyses tend to efface the prolific vagaries of meanings within fashion systems. The tendency to attribute a singular, foundational and formative identity factor is not confined solely to those analyses grounded in the critique of fashion as an instrument of capital, though economic reductionism springs to mind as a familiar analytical strategy here. Feminisms too, however, have criticised fashion as being simply the instrument of patriarchal definitions of femininity, expressed as the marginalised other in the practices of gender relations. The strategy in some feminist camps has therefore

been the outright rejection of fashion as an oppressive social element, an ideology of women's subservience in both its productive and consumptive aspects. In each case, commentators call for a return to more `natural' forms of dress, simple and useful garments which both subvert the wastes generated by cyclical fashions, and assert a purer, less adulterated and essential human nature, whether that be masculine or feminine.

Yet the codification of fashion meanings as intrinsically ambivalent in an increasingly complex social and cultural context signals the dissolution of the opposition between the natural and the artificial. In this conception, the natural can simply no longer be held up as the antithesis of unnatural or artificial fashions: contemporary calls for dress reform are particularly ironic in an age where the `natural' has itself become a very deliberate `look' in the catalogue of fashion, a carefully contrived and performed position of identification with the social values of oppositional movements. This co-optation of potentially subversive elements by the global, commodified system of fashion marketing and consumption serves to underline the pervasiveness of fashion within our society. To pose a conspiracy of fashion marketing, capital status mores, patriarchal precedents or the tyranny of sign value is, however, to attribute an unconvincing degree of passivity in social agents. Many `reductive' arguments, it can be readily accepted, are quite persuasive as far as they go; but their cogency is surely limited, and incidentally challenged by the parade of monumental fashion `flops' recorded throughout history: the refusal by social actors, particularly women, to integrate the differences and meanings attributed by certain instances of fashion into their conception of self, their boundaries of identification.

Accordingly, fashion has begun to be reconceived as codified processes of cultural representation, discursively constructed alongside a more malleable theorisation of subjective social identities. The theme of ambivalence in the formation of self has, in fact, had long currency within social science literature. The challenge to the unified and decisive liberal/rational subject was articulated in the writings of Marx, Freud and Neitzche, and has continued throughout the literature of fashion in the twentieth century: Flugel, Steele, Simmel, Kaiser, Wilson and Davis have all variously

considered the ambivalence of subjective identities and fashions as a significant proposition in their analyses. But only now is the idea of the fractal, multiple and contingent self receiving full acknowledgement. Arguments relating to the interdependence of discursive practices which co-construct identities and fashions - most notably those poststructuralist texts arguing for positional subjective identities - redress a theoretical imbalance in the consideration of mutable identities as central sites of fashions' ambivalences. In the place of - or at the very least **alongside** - macrosociological explanations of fashion, more intricate and reflexive themes are emerging which recognise the instabilities of identities and the ambivalence of their interaction with fashion's cultural forms. The idea which governs this thesis is thus arguably the fruition of a `long revolution' in cultural theory, rather than (as it might appear at times) a fashionable and immediately contemporary postmodernist invention.

Having attempted to establish this line of thought, further progressive reasoning suggests a distinctive and potentially fruitful sociological research agenda which builds on and extends these theoretical considerations in a way I have not been able to consider in this context. For example, there is a marked tendency within fashion markets, whether haute couture or more mass styles such as Levis jeans, to produce for consumption on a global scale. Paradoxically however, cultural identities are becoming more local, more regionalised and specialised - as evidenced in moves towards market niching in the dissemination of cultural commodities. An adequate theoretical model of fashion therefore needs to be able to account for the contradictions between the movements of the western capitalist economy and the subjective experiences of those who live within its boundaries. Secondly, the social and cultural analysis of fashion has not been specific enough about the sections of the population to which it refers. Even if the central point of analysis is the cultural construction of social identities, there is a tendency within the social science literature on fashion to generalise the analysis to a host of very different experiential junctures in fashion identities. Both the more `classic' paradigm of fashion change, and the more recent eclectic or populist models refer to specific groups of people; predominantly western, predominantly white and bourgeois/middle class,

predominantly women. The important factor to consider in this instance is **how far** the models might extend to other groups within the social milieu; or, to put it another way, **who** is it within our society that is able to express elements of their social and cultural identities through fashion's mechanisms (McRobbie:1991b)? These questions interrogate the relative power of different groups to define their own identities, and the ability of these groups to mobilise self-definitions through their control of cultural institutions.

Thirdly, a series of questions remain largely unaddressed by fashion scholars, investigations that may well shed further light on the facility of various arguments to explain the interpellations of ambivalent subjective identities. What place has the body in the scene of fashion? How are bodies conceived within the designing fashion world, and what role does the consciousness of the body play in the subjective reception and transmutation of fashions' representational meanings? There is scope here also for more intensive investigation of the way in which social agents - in the course of ongoing and everyday social practices - manipulate and challenge the fashion structures which inform their lives; an analysis which complements the theoretical awareness of important processes of power and structuration. What specific practices are used by individuals in their ambivalent encounters with fashion to create identities? What subjective processes are at work in the practices of fashion consumption? How does consumption elicit **dissatisfaction** in social subjects (as opposed to the desire and pleasure that have been significant themes in popular cultural studies) that contribute to the great fashion `flops'? Any of these further investigations must necessarily recognise the central role of identity ambivalences in the theory of fashion, yet they also require an awareness of macrosociological understandings of capital marketing and signification processes.

The last statement indicates a major difficulty in attributing the conception of identities as emergent and ambivalent to a `postmodern' type of analysis which altogether challenges `modernist' meta-narratives of consciousness and identity. The means through which this debate is often framed in contemporary social science - modernist versus postmodernist terms of reference - is at best misleading. Misleading,

because theorists who are sometimes categorised as `postmodern' often reject the nomination, whilst others contend that the postmodern refers more to a mode of theorising and state of being than it does to a paradigmatic form of analysis situated in stark opposition to the modern. The formulation is theoretically difficult because it effaces both the differences and the similarities between particular modern and postmodern analyses; in the field of fashion, most notably the persistence of Veblen's themes in the work of Baudrillard, and the identification of more fluid and ambivalent modes of thought in modernist explanations such as Simmel and Wilson. The notion of fragmented and multiple identities cannot necessarily be conflated with the notion of an exclusively postmodern form of subjectification; nor can a `modern' or a `postmodern' position be definitively characterised as possessing distinct or necessarily explicit attributes.

The argument here is not, however, that modernist and postmodernist arguments are interchangeable as such. Nor am I proposing that postmodernism is simply another intellectual fashion; on the contrary, postmodernist arguments have had a significant impact on the sociological theorisation of popular culture, fashions and identities since their emergence. Postmodern conceptualisations of the social have signalled a shift in social theorising, not only in the sense that previously hegemonic scientific paradigms have been significantly challenged, but also in the sense that the definite influence of postmodern texts is prompting genuinely novel avenues of sociological investigation. What I **am** arguing, is that it is perhaps more useful to conceive the relationship between modernism and postmodernism in terms of the possibilities presented by the cross-interrogations of specific texts, rather than as a monolithically constructed opposition of paradigms as often happens in the course of debate for and against the characteristic representations of each position as singular.

Commentators of popular culture from a number of different sociological and social psychological perspectives are thus beginning to seriously consider the role of ambivalent identities in the positioning of contemporary social subjects in relation to fashionable culture. Many of these theories move beyond the terms of the debate between the modern and the postmodern, and cannot be easily categorised as either

theoretical form through commonly accepted conceptual mechanisms of differentiation. In a significant section of the contemporary literature on fashion, there is a simultaneous concern with a multitude of contradictory themes; the increasingly global structure of capitalism and the way consumers purchase goods in specific boutiques; the pervasiveness of the fashion image in contemporary media, and the coding process engaged by individuals creating their own `look'; the massive and public divisions of class and status and the private perusal of fashion magazines; the creation and dissemination of gender ideologies, and the bricolage of subcultural styles. Reassuringly, feminist analyses are amongst some of the most important exploratory texts in a field attempting to establish more reflexive and ambivalent means of theorising the fashioning of identities. McRobbie's studies of teenage girls' culture, Evans' and Thornton's dissection of fashion design and women's experiences of sartorial subcultures, Wilson's exhaustive catalogue of historical, political and theoretical perspectives, all employ a specifically feminist approach to the subjects of fashions. Appropriately, the available analytic texts of fashion are becoming as diverse and eclectic as the field of fashion itself.

This eclecticism is certainly a point of issue for critics, who fear that theoretical eclecticism can imply theoretical and political relativism. Throughout this thesis I have referred back to the question of politics, and although the discussion has necessarily been cursory in that regard, it remains a vital overarching interest, since the relationship between the social subject and the political field remains a central focus in the ongoing investigation of fashion. If the subject is considered fractal, open and fluid, critics enquire, then where is the potential for collective social action and political intervention?

The relationship between emancipatory politics and the developing theoretical realm of what is termed the `postmodern' is both an intensely interesting and fraught area of investigation. I want to direct attention to feminisms in particular at this point, because of the central role of feminisms in the analysis of fashion as a cultural form associated most directly with women. It should be noted, however, that troubled relationships in the theorisation of fashions are not confined to those between

feminisms and postmodernisms, but rather apply equally in a general sense to different class or ethnic politics in various contexts which stress the relativity and positionality of identities.

That fashion is a significantly political activity is a necessary consequence of my perspective in this thesis. Throughout history, fashion has been a vehicle for the expression of political beliefs and values; from the strategic placement of patches to indicate political party support in the seventeenth century, to 1960s hippy garb denoting anti-conservatism. Elizabeth Wilson (1985), as a theorist of modernity, has argued succinctly that fashion's vagaries are the source of valuable explorations of political alternatives.

> The pointlessness of fashion... is precisely what makes it valuable. It is in this marginalised area of the contingent, the decorative, the futile, that not simply a new aesthetic but a new cultural order may seed itself. Out of the cracks in the pavement of cities grow the weeds that begin to rot the fabric (1985:245).

When the question of social subjective identities is introduced however, the formulation becomes infinitely more complex. As I have argued within this text, identities are the contingent element in social relationships, especially in their ambivalent construction through discourses of cultural representation. The liminal points of culture at which ideology becomes invisible are the character of identities. Identities are always emergent, positioned through a web of social process which are at once constructed through dynamics of power, but also never wholly fixed. However, the concern arises that if each juncture in the myriad social spaces of economics, culture or politics is taken as a purely contingent locus of identification - as they are in many formulations which are ascribed the status of postmodern - then there seems little justification for an enduring politics of collective intervention around issues of collective inequality.

Several notable critics have presented this concern. Best and Kellner (1991), for example, have argued that within a `postmodern' politics,

> (d)ifferences can become reified and fetishised, and can produce rigid barriers between individuals and groups, leading to a replication of special interest group politics.

> Common interests can be obscured in favour of heterogeneity, difference and fragmentation that ultimately buttresses white male and capitalist domination. Politics can also be redefined into a harmless politics of style and personal identity that leaves relations of domination intact and unchallenged. (ibid:213)

Feminist scholars too have been critical of postmodern theory in its implications for political intercession. Somer Brodribb (1992) has produced a scathing analysis of specific forms of thought usually associated with the postmodern - in particular a variety of French social theory including Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. Di Stefano (1990) and Harding (1990) (amongst others in Nicholson:1990) bring a critical light to bear on the possible politics of postmodernism in relation to feminisms. In specific relation to fashion, Elizabeth Wilson (1985) is sceptical of the postmodern aestheticisation of politics which, drawing on Benjamin, she argues is fascist in tendency; denying the meaning of politics, placing style above humanity and justifying cruelty and death in the name of aesthetics. Benjamin pointed to the futurists, who extolled the beauties of the patterns made by shell blasts, as they maimed and killed at the point of explosion. Wilson further cites Riefenstahl's films of the Nuremburg Rally, which transformed ranks of black fascist and fetishistic Nazi uniforms into pleasing patterns of light, shade and form. Wilson argues that `postmodern' culture must be criticised for those moments in which style becomes more important than the meaning attached to social events and actions (1990c); and many specific texts that utilise postmodern themes would reject a conclusion of nihilism or meaninglessness. Fashion itself, however, constituted as it is through the ambivalence and ambiguities of identities, never quite reaches the point of meaninglessness, or, more properly, of celebration style over meaning. Historically, fashion has been a significant site at which oppositional ideology is articulated. Dandies, Mods, Teddy Boys, Bohemians, Punks, Zoot Suiters, Rastafarians and Feminists (to name a few) have all variously advocated in different temporal and cultural contexts the need for different forms of dress to prompt, abet or encourage ideological change.

> (F)ashion, like capitalism itself, is so contradictory it at least has the potential to challenge those ideologies in which it is itself enmeshed - as can all popular cultural forms, so long, that is, as we have some coherent political position... from which to criticise (Wilson:1985:205).

I would argue that it is the recent explosion of cultural forms such as fashion which has tended to obliterate oppositional meanings in the view of writers such as Baudrillard and the Ewens; but a proliferation of fashionable forms or styles does not necessarily preclude or erase the subversion and play of meaning, no matter how ambivalent or ambiguous that meaning may be. The problem lies as much in the means through which social science paradigms conceive the relative structuration or agency of identities as it does in the cultural forms themselves. As I have argued, many conceptualisations of fashions posit identities as singular or essential, and further determined either by an ultimately `natural' self, or else social factors such as the `market' beyond the control of the individual. While these have been criticised as universalising and reductionistic, the view of identities as multiple and indeterminate encounters difficulties in the domain of the political, in identifying the means through which individuals are positioned in social configurations of power, and the means through which that power is continually enacted and subverted. On the one hand, fashion offers the opportunity to articulate ideological opposition. On the other hand, this opposition is always constrained through its use of commodities and consumption which contribute to, or constitute the ideologies rebellious fashions seek to subvert. To propose that these constraints therefore preclude agency however, is to misconstrue the junctures at which agency operates. To argue that the subject is constituted is not to claim that the subject is determined in any final sense; rather the perception of social identities as constructed enables the reconfiguration and change of those identities. Similarly, in politics, to argue for the destabilisation of social identities leads to political uncertainty, but uncertainty or instability need not necessarily lead to co-optation or nihilism.

In proposing that a sense of political possibility can remain part of the perspective I am extending, I do not wish to evade the serious argument that the `disintegration of identity' may imply the `end of politics'. Significant sociological debate must continue to be conducted around this question. In conclusion however, I would argue that there continues to be a sartorial space from which individuals might articulate oppositional ideologies, and from which feminists can `advocate feminism' (bell hooks:1984) without determining feminism in an essentialist manner. As the morass of fashion

images proliferate, there are increasingly different means through which both individualities and solidarities can be expressed so that:

> Once literacy and a rich vocabulary of visual, aural and dramatic expressions exist, then society has a permanently available... resource in which all the tabooed, fantastic, possible and impossible dreams of humanity can be explored in blueprint (Martin:1981:51).

Such is the character (and politics) of fashion.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1. Useful texts which outline central dynamic or processual approaches to fashion include Tarde, G. (1903/1962) **Laws of Imitation** Henry Holt & Company, Peter Smith: United States., Kroeber, A. C. (1919) `On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes of Fashion' in **American Anthropologist** Vol. 21., July 1919: pp. 235-263., Rogers, R. (1962) **Diffusion of Innovations** The MacMillan Company: United States., Young, A. B. (1966) **Recurring Cycles of Fashion: 1760-1937** Cooper Square Publishers: New York., Grindering, M. (1967) `Fashion Diffusion' in **Journal of Home Economics** Vol. 59., No. 3., March 1967: pp. 171-174., Reynolds, F. D., & Darden, W. R. (1972) `Why the Midi Failed' in **Journal of Advertising Research** Vol. 12., August 1972: pp. 39-44., Reynolds, F. D., & Darden, W. R. (1973) `Fashion Theory and Pragmatics: The Case of the Midi in **Journal of Retailing** Vol. 49., No. 1., Spring 1973: pp. 51-62.

CHAPTER THREE

1. For an extended critique of the `Dress for Sucess' ethos see Chapkis, W. (1988) **Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance** The Womens Press: London.

2. See Berg (1991) for support and critique of Irigaray. Berg Documents Plaza, Jones, Moi & Burke as suggesting Irigaray's notions tto be naive and essentialist.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Amongst those who explicitly reject the label of `postmodernist' are Julia Kristeva & Jean Baudrillard. See Butler, J. (1992) `Contingent Foundations' in **Feminists Theorize the Political** Routledge: United States.

2. Thanks to Dr. Mary Murray for clarifying Simmel's work in this area.

3. For a descriptive account of the global extent of the fashion industry see Coleridge, N. (1988) **The Fashion Conspiracy** William Heinemann Ltd.: Great Britain.

4. Barthes argued that three modes of representation outlined the relationship between the abstract body and the real body as constituted by fashion. The first was a relationship of pure abstraction, as in the `cover girl', where fashion renders her body as `no body' in particular in a tautological reference to the garment itself. The second mode is whereby a particular `type' of face or body was said to be in fashion. The third relationship was the power of the clothing to transform any particular body into the ideal body for fashion. Gane, M. (1991) **Baudrillard's Bestiary: Baudrillard and Culture** Routlege: London.

5. The sense of a death wish - and its attempted subversion - expressed in fashion, is a common theme which indicates the contradictory nature of social and cultural life. Fashion focuses on eternal youth, while accelerating the transience and death of fashionable forms. Thus, fashion might be considered a manic ideology which seeks to defend against the very real human condition of aging and death. Real bodies are replaced by the abstract and ideal bodies of the fashion world - and the way in which fashion constantly changes serves to `fix' the notion of the body as eternal and unchanging. Fashion masques the process of biological deterioration, while simultaneouly frezing the processes of identification and change into the reassuring conviction of image.
   According to Kracauer (1927), `Photography's boundedness by time expresses

precisely that of fashion. Since it has no other meaning than the contemporary human mask, what is modern is transparent and what is old is left behind...(T)hey illustrate not the knowledge of the original but the spatial configuration of a moment in time; it is not the person who steps out of his (sic) photograph, but the sum of that which can be stripped away from him' (in Frisby:1985:153-154).

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