An Apparent Ugliness:
Fashion and Dressing Poor

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Kate Louise Rhodes

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Synopsis

Whereas fashion's drive keeps us in a constant embrace with changing styles, this thesis has at its centre the question: "What happens when modern fashion is no longer driven by beauty and glamour?" Arguably, the rise of what we call fashion and its liberation of beauty from classical canons occurred simultaneously during the nineteenth century. Umberto Eco writes, "beauty could now express itself by making opposites converge, so that ugliness was no longer the negation of beauty, but its other face". Moreover, we hear repeatedly that we coexist with contrasting models of beauty "because the opposition beautiful/ugly *no longer has any aesthetic value*: ugly and beautiful would be two possible options to be experienced neutrally". That is, both beauty and ugliness are made up of interdependent and complex references. Thus the thesis is a tour through what will be called "apparent ugliness" and the spectrum of ugliness in fashion as a way to discuss our relationship with style and our social bodies. In parallel, the thesis tracks the changing way we think about our clothes and their state of appearance.

Structurally, each chapter explores the concept of apparent ugliness as the positive reformation of holes, stains, tears and the clothing of the poor in fashion. An apparent ugliness is the historical supplement, I argue, behind the current trend for poor looks. This redrawing of the traditional aesthetic drivers of fashion make dressing poor a complex field of study. At its heart, ugliness reconfigures those features deliberately kept at fashion's margins as acceptable, even high street style.

The thesis is a hermeneutic study: it wants to interpret ugliness in fashion. In exposing the mechanics of fashion, in revealing the seams as it were of those traditional drivers of fashion – beauty and glamour – we see the destruction of the illusion of fashion and an unknotting of many of the certainties around how and why we dress the way we do. Thus dressing poor represents a willful instability in its relationship to beauty and offers an alternative way to think through the history of fashion.

Introduction

Conclusion

Introduction

Imagine a wardrobe of contemporary clothes. Inspecting the garments hanging inside one by one we find that most were created by avant-garde fashion designers, though some have the tags of mainstream brand names sewn in. Each item in the wardrobe shares distinctive but unifying features. They are oversized, or radically distorted in shape, or they appear as if they are dirty, ripped, stained, riddled with holes, or made from thrown away or throw-away materials. All of the garments and accessories, it seems, have either been inspired by ragamuffin sub-cultural styles or the tattered, ill-fitting and filthy garb of those living on the street. However, on very close inspection, all of these clothes are actually brand new. That is, they don't seem to have ever been worn.

Ironically perhaps, given their appearance, most of the garments in the wardrobe are so well-known that they are now in museum collections around the world or have been published in critical fashion journals or curated into exhibitions. Thus when we look into the wardrobe we can identify a range of garments and accessories including Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren's punk-inspired "Let it Rock" top (1974); Comme des Garçons's "Hole" sweater (1981-2) and examples from the brand's so-called "Bump" collection (1997); Kosuke Tsumura's "Final Home" coat, designed to incorporate screwed up newspaper (1994); Martin Margiela's coats and dresses covered in mould, tops crafted out of army surplus gear and shoes covered in mud (1997–2006); an outfit from John Galliano's "Hobo" collection (2000); a jacket from Puma's "grease" stained Moto collection (2007) and a Louis Vuitton shoulder bag resembling a garbage bin liner (2010).

The clothes and accessories inside in the wardrobe will drive this thesis. Some will be taken out ands studied closely, while others will only be briefly touched on to help illustrate what greater meanings we might discover about the wardrobe contents. As we will see, and despite appearances that would suggest otherwise, such garments have more often than not been at the centre of fashion, rather than at the periphery and all have been made to be worn. The result is that a wholly unexpected aesthetic condition exists within this wardrobe. Although fashion is traditionally motivated by aesthetics and qualities such as elegance, glamour and attractiveness, the wardrobe contents represent what we might call an "apparent ugliness", fashion's uncertain other. When closely examined, these garments reveal a significant, yet under-explored, aspect of the fashion system in that they provide a theoretical and visual footing for a discussion around fashion and ugliness. Each garment and accessory inverts the appeal of the pristine fashion purchase that is typically clean and fresh and instead reflects what can be described as a "poor aesthetic" as they appear old and dirty. In the persistence of the supplementary figure of ugliness throughout fashion's history, such garments show that novel and atypical features have in fact never been far away from fashion.

In a parallel category to the contemporary garments hanging in the wardrobe, there are a number of examples from earlier eras. For example, French fashion designer Gabriele "Coco" Chanel's "little black dress" of the 1920s represents an instance of where the attire of the working-classes has been adopted by those can afford the best but deliberately choose styles, cuts, fabrics and even colours below their social station.[1] And yet with all of these significant examples, very few fashion writers, buyers and curators have explored the role and significance of dressing poor in fashion – the name I will give to the contemporary trend.

The supposed norms of Western dress dictate that fashion is defined by the prevalent style of the day.[2] While "fashion" describes the most popular clothing styles, many "fashions" can coexist. Clothing brings the individual to the

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[1] Coco Chanel's 'little black dress' refers to a simply-shaped, black-coloured working girl's dress, appropriated and reworked by the designer for women of a higher social station.
[2] See for example, James Laver and Amy de la Haye *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002 [1969]).

community and it is through dress that we signal our understanding of the most common social codes that help define a society.[3] Significantly, the course of design and fashion changes more rapidly than culture as a whole. Since at least the 1960s, what is "in fashion" is "lost in a plethoric confusion of creators and diversified looks" and what results is an "optional, flexible mimicry" of the latest styles.[4] Thus, while the majority of consumers are more or less aware of what are currently the most fashionable looks, strict slavery to fashion trends has waned. Since at least the 1960s, the logic of "producing what has never been seen before" has driven mainstream fashion. Frequently, this desire for novelty has been to the point of extremes, and internal contradictions, so that in recent years both long and short skirts can simultaneously be in vogue, as can a look that declares the old, the spoilt and the ugly to be the embodiment of cool.[5] In light of this, the "double-take" is revealed to be closer to the heart of fashion than we may have anticipated – where the duel coding of garments plays into a desire to continually destabilize fashion's certainties. Thus fashion's commitment to *novelty* – the fresh, the unusual and innovative – has remained the only truism of its complex character.

Wearing clothes with holes, stains and tears – like wearing clothes considered low class – has a long history of artistic and political associations. It has stood as a sign of independence and a refusal of social mores and standards.[6] For example, in 1789 when the French Revolution broke out, to symbolise their separation from the aristocracy, the revolutionaries of all classes adopted the dress of the lower classes as ideological propaganda for the new age. They declared their rebellious spirits visually, through wearing long pants, jackets, Phrygian cap and clogs – the clothing of the masses. Those wearing extravagant silks were considered defenders of the *ancien regime*, and enemies of the revolution. On the other hand, the seeming perversity of the consumption of garments that look poor today, but which are typically very expensive, can be seen in light of historical examples that also might be described as "extreme

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[3] Richard Martin and Harold Koda *Infra-apparel* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art 1993) 10.

[4] Gilles Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1994) 119.

[5] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 232.

[6] See Anne Hollander *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 1993).

fashion" or "anti fashion". For example, the super wide panniers of the mid 1700s demanded the widening of doorways and updated chair design so as to accommodate their girth, while the fashion for extremely long poulaine shoes required the wearer to monitor his steps with tethered strings connecting foot and hand as if he were a puppeteer. Each example suggests a fashion for the short term, whether it be clothing that dictates extreme or anti-social behaviour, its value as a curiosity, its newness, is unsustainable. Those who choose to dress poor explore novelty in ways that are both physical and symbolic. In particular, punk dress was a deliberate refutation of the perceived excess and pretension found in mainstream music. Punk dress was originally connected with members of the underground music scene in New York in the 1960s and in the UK in the 1970s and was an ensemble deliberately violated by the wearer or the designer with holes or tears, leaving garments vulnerable to total ruination. In this way, dressing poor can be understood as a highly symbolic costume, where difference is a form of newness.

Jeans

Jeans are an item of clothing that help to anchor many of the fundamental characteristics of dressing poor. Jeans are now worn by almost all classes, genders, ages and across numerous regional and national lines. The deep market penetration of jeans derives, in significant part, from their adaptable identity having changed from a garment associated exclusively with hard work to one invested with the symbolic attributes of leisure: ease, comfort, casualness, sociability and the outdoors.[7] The trousers were first made, as is widely the case today, from a sturdy, indigo-dyed cotton cloth.[8]

Jeans have long been associated with groups on the fringe of society and this fact remains key to their attractiveness today. After workers and the poor, jeans were associated with the wardrobe of artists in the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s, jeans were worn by "hoodlum" bikers. They popularised by Marlon

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[7] Fred Davis *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (London: University of Chicago Press 1992) 70-1.
[8] The cotton cloth was said to have originated in Nimes, France. Hence the anglicised contraction to denim from the French *de Ninems*. Before Levi Strauss produced his trousers for goldminers and other outdoor labourers it is thought that sailors had worn a similar style of garb in France as did dockworkers in Genoa, Italy who were referred to as "genes", again anglicised to jeans.

Brando, James Dean and left-wing activists and hippies in the 1960s after which they gained their broad appeal.[9] But before their mass consumption in the United States cheap blue jeans stood in strong opposition to the dominant conservative, middle-class, consumer-oriented culture.[10] Thus jeans exude a significant non-fashion symbolism: once everyone starts wearing a particular item of fashion, it soon neutralises or sterilises whatever significance its signifiers had before becoming objects of fashion. The great shift from denim jeans symbolising democracy and utility, and then classlessness, means that jeans now also represent an ambivalent, even deliberately depoliticised fashion statement.

The contemporary trend for ripped and torn jeans avoids all links to the banality and drabness of the original denim trousers first manufactured in 1850s for the labouring classes.[11] Then, signs of work were inherent to the cheap, mass-produced trousers by Morris Levi Strauss, a Bavarian Jewish peddler newly arrived in San Francisco, for itinerant sailors and miners. Following trends established in the 1960s for stone-washed, faded, bleached or brushed denim, manufacturers of so-called "premium jeans" can today charge up to US$600 a pair for jeans that have been made to appear as if they are dirty or that have a ready-patched and distressed appearance after special treatments like sandpapering.[12] In 2009 Balmain's distressed jeans were AUD$2500 a pair.[13] Indeed in the last few years manufacturers have even begun to produce eco distressed jeans using a textile laser that achieves worn and aged looks by scanning a pair of vintage jeans and reproducing the exact look, down to holes and abrasions, in less than a minute – eliminating the use of chemical abrasives and vast amounts of water and electricity.[14]

The popular trend of wearing ripped jeans is now at the end of its third decade and only recently did one newspaper fashion journalist write, "This season's

[9] Davis *Fashion, Culture and Identity* 70.

[10] Davis *Fashion, Culture and Identity* 70.

[11] Joanne Finkelstein *Slaves of Chic: An A-Z of Consumer Pleasures* (Melbourne: Minerva 1994) 136.

[12] Guy Trebay 'Who Pays $600 for Jeans?' *The New York Times* April 21, 2005. See also Rachel Wells 'Well Worn' *The Age* Tuesday May 24 Metro 2005: 2-3.

[13] Rachel Wells 'On the Radar' *The Age* June 14 2009 12.

[14] http://www.nicefashion.org/en/professional-guide/production/jeans.html Accessed 2.6.10

jeans are the tattiest they've been since the mid-to-late 1980s."[15] Significantly, the writer advises readers of her column to be sure that the ripped jeans they choose are not too big or too ripped, lest wearers appear destitute.[16] In a curious intra-class affair, the rich distance themselves from the poor by 'dressing poor'; in wearing expensive jeans with holes or stains the meaning-exchange between wearer and viewer of the look is primarily directed between those who can afford it and those who recognise the economic, social and psychological dimensions at play.

Expensive, but degraded versions of jeans, have become a principal example of how dress is the foremost example of conspicuous consumption because almost nobody is absent from the game of "competitive emulation" at the heart of fashion. In *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) Thorstein Veblen referred to the emerging ruling class at the turn of nineteenth century America as the "leisure class"; something of an amalgam of the rich, the hyper-rich, the owning class, the upper class, the business class, the aristocracy, the *nouveau riche*, and high society.[17] He coined the now-common concepts of "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure" as part of a theory around the social question of "unnecessary expenditure" which in turn drive "pecuniary culture". Within the text, conspicuous consumption is defined as the publicly manifested waste of money and/or resources by people to display a higher status than that of others. People, rich and poor alike, attempt to impress and seek to gain and signal status. Thus, rather than signalling the signs of hard labour, today's "ragged" jeans advance the wearer's ability to consume "useless commodities" by deliberately choosing garments closest (in appearance) to the end of their life cycle, beyond what would normally be considered useful or attractive. In addition, jeans show how consumer culture fosters feelings of rebelliousness that in turn become vehicles for consumption.[18] Indeed, the wearer can choose to dabble with the look of poverty while simultaneously adding to his or her symbolic waste. By consuming a fashion that is not only costume-like, and

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[15] Wells 'On the Radar' 12.
[16] Wells 'On the Radar' 13.
[17] Michael Carter *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003) 45.
[18] Eva Illiouz 'Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A new research agenda' *Journal of Consumer Culture* Vol 9, 3, 2009 393.

therefore disposable in its deliberately ephemeral design and construction, it also adds labour intensive ornamentation such as pre-purchase tears that require further processing and manual labour to create them.

Chemically treated, pre-abraded, pre-torn, pre-holed garments degrade materials and render them structurally vulnerable, and thus open to faster ruination. Moreover, many brands of jeans today include expensive hand-stitching in the form of decorative patches, rips and tears or achieve their worn look using hand-worked abrasion techniques such as "whiskering" – a process of hand-teasing the denim threads around holes which is translated into higher prices. Arguably, as a fashion trend, holes, tears and stains in fact hasten a garment's obsolescence and status as conspicuous waste. They are forms of useless ornamentation that, as architect and theorist Adolf Loos who linked waste with ornamentations would decry.

As Veblen notes, fashion is an intra-class affair and changes in clothing styles are chiefly about impressing the "select circle whose good opinion is chiefly sought".[19] To a large degree this is also the case with what I am calling "the poor look".[20] The rich distance themselves from the poor in dressing poor and the meaning-exchange involved in the look takes place between those who can afford it and those who recognise its economic, social and psychological dimensions. Significantly, dressing poor also reiterates the now standard semiotic view that consumption is less about the utilitarian value of objects – since frequently their usefulness is dubious – than it is about their symbolic meaning: commodities themselves are not so much material objects as they are cultural meanings that in turn provide access to emotional categories and experiences.[21]

The field and the approach

This thesis is an interpretation of dressing poor in episodes, drawn out from fashion history where it is most visible and convincing. Even though I am exploring an imaginary wardrobe, the examples will consist of actual garments,

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[19] Carter *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes* 50.
[20] In its post 1980s incarnation.
[21] Illiouz 'Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A new research agenda' 380.

fashion photography and the narratives surrounding these selected fragments from the history of dress. This thesis describes dressing poor as an idea, an object and a series of images. It is a look in search of a theory and a broader explanation and reasoning than has been offered so far. Importantly, this thesis explores the *concept* of dressing poor. It takes a visually deconstructive approach to understanding what will be termed "poor looks" by "unpacking" its mediated forms such as fashion photography and fashion blogs.

Deconstruction is the name which was given by French philosopher Jacques Derrida to an approach which rigorously pursues the meaning of a text to the point of undoing the oppositions on which it is apparently founded. For Derrida, binary structures have real political consequences because one term is always given priority over the other. For instance, beauty is almost always seen as being superior to ugliness. How we intervene in this binary system that we cannot escape is Derrida's dilemma, and his challenge. But Derrida does not try to solve the problem, rather he calls into question the identities of each term in any binary, as we will here. Thus deconstructing the terms of dressing poor shows that it is defined by its multiple irreconcilable and contradictory meanings. It is a look that suggests fashion's foundations in beauty are irreducibly unstable. In effect then, Derrida would suggest that we reveal the various ways in which any particular example of either beauty or ugliness in fashion is in contradiction with itself. It follows that fashion, the traditional host of beauty, must be shown to be riddled with "the virus" of ugliness – always there at its core. Certainty is precisely what the trend for dressing poor does not offer. In light of this, poor looks are arguably better defined via their relationship with amorphous, ill-defined, multi-faceted novelty.

Literature

The notion of dressing poor can be mapped using the work of modern and postmodern philosophers and cultural theorists such as Thorstein Veblen, Georg Simmel, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Mary Douglas, Jean Baudrillard, Dick Hebdige, Julie Kristeva as well as fashion theorists such as Robin Givhan, Caroline Evans and Rebecca Arnold. My narrative plots key moments in the trend for dressing poor by tracing a cluster of ideas around

what it has meant during fashion history from the fourteenth century to the present. Importantly, however, this thesis is not a history of fashion, even though it will draw heavily on fashion's past. It asks the reader to take fashion's basic chronology for granted. The focus of the thesis is to give depth to our understanding of fashion's encounter with a poor aesthetic in dress today – among both designers, non-designers and fashion consumers.

If dressing poor is still in search of a unifying thread, then this thread, once identified via the fragments examined here, should yield a method for understanding its continuing interest and validity. During the fourteenth century in the West the apparent ugliness at the heart of dressing poor had been enforced and written into sumptuary laws, while since the 1980s it has been desired as a fashion trend, relatively indistinct from other trends. As such it is not always a fashion which exists within its own margins. Social divisions maintained by dress, are stripped into slivers and paraded as a fusion indicative of the major cultural and historical shifts fashion is witness to.

In other words, I seek to outline the idea of dressing poor in fashion using today's knowledge to read the past and to employ historical examples as a way of building up an argument about the validity and power of its contemporary manifestation as a trend. The central arguments seek to draw out the implications of the trend and its significance. What is clear is that the frequent and reoccurring appearance of holes, stains and tears in fashionable clothes suggests that these surface markings have had considerable impact on how fashion is understood and how it communicates. Apparent imperfections are not always what they seem. We might speculate that the reason for this ambiguity lies in the complex, even strange, relationship between imperfection and the widely-held desire for authenticity in beauty of which fashion plays a key facilitating role. In spite of the fact that the fashion industry traditionally promotes faddism, exclusivity and the extraordinary, the trend for dressing poor that began in the 1980s is most closely associated with directly opposing features: the flawed, spoiled and irregular. Dressing poor is the product of a postmodern fashion system that playfully overturns the terms of beauty, elegance and glamour that have long underpinned fashion. Postmodernism

values uncertainty and embraces irony and double-coding to uncover garments rich in layered meanings.

This research should be evaluated in light of other relevant material in the field as well as by its relevance to fashion history and theory more generally. Recent years have seen a surge of academic interest in the second-hand clothing trade, in the trend for wearing vintage and the desire for dereliction. For example Caroline Evans's book *Fashion At the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (2003) is a key text for thinking about the ruination of clothing for fashion.[22] Evans notes that during 1990s a new kind of "conceptual" fashion designer evolved, one who regularly worked with images of dereliction as a sign of mutability. She suggests that a bohemian notion of poverty (what has been branded as "bo-ho chic") appealed to consumers whose cultural capital allowed them to perceive the added value of these clothes. That is, clothes with an avant-garde aesthetic distinct from the look of shiny newness, luxury and excess of mainstream fashion garnered new attention during this period. As a result of this condition, the consumption of such garments communicates a wearer's critical rejection of ostentation while acting as a sign of differentiation in their ability to de-code the look. Evans explores this theory through visual analysis and the writings of Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin, amongst others.

One of the most relevant recent texts in the field is Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark's *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (2005).[23] Palmer and Clark explore how second-hand clothes have been transformed and reused in a variety of social, economic and cultural contexts in the past and today. The selection of edited essays includes some closely focused readings of particular periods such as second hand clothing trade in England c. 1600–1850, Australia 1788–1900 and Ireland 1930–1980. To give depth to our understanding of the role of the secondary market, the book also includes wide-ranging accounts of secondhand clothing markets or trends in traditionally under-researched fashion markets such as Zambia, the Philippines and Hong Kong. In each case,

[22] See Caroline Evans *Fashion At the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).
[23] See Alexandra Palmer & Hazel Clark (eds.) *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (New York: Berg, 2005).

the authors look at where and why clothes have been and continue to be re-consumed and transformed.

A crucial early essay of relevance to this thesis is Richard Martin's "Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s" (1992).[24] Martin explores how fashion in the nineties – and grunge in particular – looked to models of decomposition and decay as a source of creativity. He describes grunge as "working-class in origin and emulation" and a new form for seeking out the 'authentic'.[25] As Martin describes it, grunge is a form of non-mass manufactured, non-commercial fashion and essentially an update to the hippy movement of the 1960s. Martin analyses the social/consumer context for the poor aesthetic in fashion in America thirty years later and suggests that the style reflects a tendency to play down wealth and an increase in the democracy of clothing preferences. He also uses deconstruction theory as a model for understanding design concerned with a poor aesthetic and is keen to emphasize the difference between impoverishment and homelessness and a look that takes inspiration from these sources. Martin's essay provides an important slice of time for my thesis in its close examination of the 1990s as I seek to uncover a fuller image of dressing poor from the 1970s onwards.

And finally, Rebecca Arnold's *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (2001) explores fashion and its image through what the writer regards to be the contradictory emotions of desire and anxiety.[26] For Arnold, fashion and fashion photographs give rise to escapist dreams that are add odds with reality. She focuses on the last thirty years of practice in these two areas and constructs her argument through examples that reveal the construction and evocation of fear and pleasure, violence, decay and beauty. She explores ideas surrounding the body and its display and morality in relation to fashion and alienation.

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[24] See Richard Martin 'Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s' Textile & Text 15, No. 2, 1992: 3-8.
[25] Martin 'Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s' 6.
[26] See Rebecca Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001).

Although in the growing and critical literature active on fashion there are books on asceticism and punk subculture. There are articles on the Little Black Dress, Second World War "fashion on the ration" and the theme of innovation, second-hand and thrift store styles. In addition, there are monographs on the fashion labels Vivienne Westwood and Comme des Garçons. As yet, however, there are no books or essays that draw these moments in fashion together under the concept of "dressing poor". This thesis attempts to occupy this gap in the literature. The notion of dressing poor and its contemporary development, circulation and history has yet to be published or supported with any conceptual framework.

The concept of an "aesthetics of poverty" – a term coined by Harold Koda in 1985, and the broader heading under which dressing poor might rest – gives scope for the exploration of sociological and cultural theories in tandem with fashion history and theory.[27] To unpack dressing poor is to unpack it as cultural sign, consumable and evidence of broader historical and social processes – as such a visual analysis of selected photographs of clothing will be a focus of this thesis. This filter is crucial. The thesis will seek to understand fashion and ugliness via its image, rather than just garments themselves. The complexity surrounding the appearance of holes, stains and tears in clothes is reflected and sustained in the production of images, since many of the extreme examples looked at here will not be consumed off the peg but via print media, online or via a smart application. In particular, since the early twentieth century, fashion photography's ability and desire to capture ugliness has been central to the formation of its significant and ongoing narrative. Today, alternative fashion magazines and fashion blogs and websites play host to some of the most compelling images of dressing poor and they have a central role in understanding the contemporary meanings of this style.[28] Indeed, as the writing of this thesis comes to its conclusion, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis continues to hold the world's biggest economies in its grip. Yet again, "recession dressing" is back on the table for discussion and fashion designers are responding.

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[27] See Harold Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' *Dress: Journal of The Costume Society of America*, Volume 11 1985: 5-10.
[28] For example see magazines such as *Purple* and *Dazed and Confused* and blogs such as *Hel Looks*.

Paradoxically in fashion, wearing second hand clothes or clothes that simulate the pre-worn via second hand styling has been transformed into a mainstream phenomenon that is today highly commodified within the global fashion system of production, marketing and consumption. Even some of the most-recognized mainstream fashion labels such as Levis, Puma and, in Australia, Country Road, produce garments with an aged and dirty appearance, factory-added holes and deliberate stains.

The current, knowing desire for second hand dress is an interpretation of fashion as a form of deconstruction that reconfigures used clothes into garments with the high status of the unique fashion piece. According to prominent American fashion curators such as Richard Martin and Harold Koda, the consistent appearance of a poor aesthetic in mainstream fashion since at least the 1980s gave birth to the idea of fashion deconstruction or *la mode Destroy* – a term used definitively by the mid 1990s – which denotes the trend toward frayed hems, recycled fabrics and garments coming apart at the seams.[29] The emergence of the look runs parallel to the effects of postmodernism in the visual arts, design, craft and architecture, the fractured economics of the marketplace and consumer patterns at this time as recession loomed worldwide.[30] It was an atmosphere of criticism, skepticism and subjectivity that defined a period keen to shake "perfect" or "pure forms" and the non-personal judgments of modernism. Thus, it is in the last decades of the twentieth century that dressing poor becomes a visible and identifiable trend with its own specific codes.

Dressing poor as a contemporary trend

As it happens, in his 1969 novel *The Wild Boys*, American author William Burroughs presciently imagined the postmodern period – the 1980s – as a time when dressing poor would be truly fashion forward:

> The chic thing is to dress in expensive tailor-made rags ... There are Bowery suits that appear to be stained with urine and vomit which on closer inspection turn out to be intricate embroideries of fine gold thread. There are clochard suits of the finest linen, shabby gentility suits ... felt

[29] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 252.
[30] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 250.

> hats seasoned by old junkies … loud cheap pimp suits that turn out to be
> not so cheap the loudness is a subtle harmony of colours only the very
> best Poor Boy shops can turn out. … It is the double take and many carry
> it much further to as many as six takes.[31]

Arguably, postmodernism freed fashion from the old imperative of ostentatious aestheticism. Consumers no longer demanded the ideals of the fresh and the original as stipulated by modernism: the terms of "the new" we so desire from fashion were no longer as rigid, indeed they were transformed. Postmodernism trumped the notion of pristine newness and instead insisted on a greater openness for fashion with the blurring of styles and the embrace of imperfection as a consequence. Moreover, as a result of postmodern impulses, we no longer demand a central role for beauty from our architects, film makers, craft practitioners and industrial designers, prompting the question: why should we continue to demand beauty from fashion? Is it that we fear being bewitched by beauty, have we become wary of being seen to desire it too much, too often, making us seem shallow? It seems that we have attempted to strip away that which might be deemed false and have begun to value alternative qualities and characteristics – including that which was once deemed ugly.

American art critic and philosopher Arthur C. Danto in his book *The Abuse of Beauty*, defines the dethroning of beauty as the essence of art.[32] He maintains that most twentieth century avant-garde art has been consciously critical of beauty but does, however, argue for the partial rehabilitation of beauty and the removal of any critical taboo against it. Beauty is one among the many modes through which concepts engage us when we view artworks: disgust, horror, sublimity, and sexuality are other modes. That is, beauty is internal to art and contributes to its meaning.[33] Danto uses the example of Jacques Louis David who exploits beauty when he paints the corpse of Marat as a beautiful figure in *The Death of Marat* (1793). So soft, pale and luminous is the flesh of the dead writer, that his flimsy body recalls a descent from the Cross scene. The beauty of

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[31] William Burroughs quoted in Dick Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd 1979) 23.

[32] See Arthur C. Danto *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the concept of art* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003).

[33] For an extended discussion on this see Chapter Two of Danto *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the concept of art.*

the deceased Marat is like the beauty of the crucified Christ, and the meaning of the painting was that Jesus/Marat died for the viewer, who must acknowledge the meaning of this sacrifice by following their messages.[34] As Danto writes, the age of pluralism has opened our eyes to the breadth of aesthetic qualities, far wider than traditional aesthetics was able to tolerate.[35]

Here we see a connection between the triumvirate of fashion, beauty and novelty. If beauty is internal to the fashion object and contributes to its meaning, as Danto suggests is possible through art, then it follows that beauty and novelty must have a strong connection in order to steer and delineate fashion. Beauty and novelty mirror and shape one another and it is the presence and balance of both features that in turn outlines the fashion of the day. Indeed we might go as far as to say that fashion cannot exist without beauty or novelty, as each dictates the significance of the other; they are co-efficient measures of the one spectrum. Arguably then beauty in fashion is rigid – it is not inherent to us, but to objects of fashion. However, it also suggests that the beauty in an object of fashion lasts only as long as that object remains close to its original state. That is, beauty exists in relative proximity to novelty and to newness: freshness and originality "freeze" beauty so to speak.

The appearance of holes, stains, tears and garments that belie their intended social group or target market signal a productive tension in fashion design. On the one hand, dressing poor embodies the transformative, individualising effects of "creative destruction" in the face of relentlessly similar, "tasteful" designs and the brazen pursuit of luxury, and on the other hand, it represents the colonisation and commodification of real poverty in order to grab attention.

The postmodern turn offers fashion a more theoretical framework for understanding the desire to constantly revive and recycle. It means that fashion no longer excludes or references or evaluates new looks as they surface, it simply reincorporates them whole. Herein lies the first core irony. Ugliness revives the old, the spoilt and stained in fashion and in doing so transforms the

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[34] Danto *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the concept of art* 120.
[35] Danto *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the concept of art* 120.

meaning of these features. Now holes and tears splinter into simulacral shards or double codes that confuse the traditional rules of dress. Now that which used to characterise ugliness can in fact be reincorporated into high fashion by its designers.

Dressing poor as a fashion statement should not be seen as a tracing of the reality of poverty, but rather as an act of visual deconstruction, as we will see from the examples of images and garments "unpacked" throughout the thesis. Indeed the current trend for dressing poor raises some key differences between the reality and the representation of poverty but shows them to be not necessarily at odds. The poverty and decay that consumerism seeks to mask (unless it is used as a strategy to sell even more) has been appropriated by designers as a theme or motif in their work. While sometimes posing as a reaction to the unjust and inequitable elements of contemporary life, it is also fundamentally, indeed inevitably, a look that is also a consumable.
The second core irony exists in the consumable itself. Philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negi have identified that those least able to obtain commodities are those who predominately produce them.[36] It is an irony played out only too clearly by the dressing poor trend; where the rich wear expensive versions of clothes that would otherwise be deemed to belong to the poor. Thus, as dressing poor apes actual poverty, yet is crafted at a distance from the poor for the middle and upper classes, it remains significant that this trend has inspired a range of emotions in the fashion and mainstream press, including admiration and rage, amusement and respect. Such is the difficulty in pinning down the meaning of the clothes in the wardrobe presented here.

When choose what to wear we carry information about ourselves and, when we conform to widely accepted standards of dress, we show an awareness of common civic codes. These codes, spiralling around neat and tidy dress as a kind of social glue, signpost that we are striving toward a standardised, Platonic ideal that we call beauty where its inverse – ugliness – is historically understood as a lack of harmony. Fashion is important because it is intimately connected to so many aspects of the social world, expressly because of its barometric nature.

[36] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press 2000).

However, in what would seem to be a paradox, fashion is able to accommodate tension around aesthetics at its core. As Gilles Lipovetsky reminds us, fashion is distinctive precisely because of its logic of "inconstancy".[37] For Lipovetsky, fashion is where "great organizational and aesthetic mutations elevate newness and the expression of human individuality to positions of dignity".[38] The fashion system is defined as the renewal of forms as a social value and has been guided by this lasting rule since the end of the Middle Ages. Fashion is novelty, an exceptional process, characterized by "its endless metamorphoses, its fits and starts, its extravagance".[39] Thus newness (defined as both cleanliness, innovation, fads and rapid shifts in direction) may co-exist with individuality (self expression and difference). Mass customization – in part, the confluence of newness and individuality – has been the most obvious and significant shift in modern consumerism, confirming ours as a desire, rather than needs-driven culture.

And yet a concern for fashion and the expression of individuality is often described as frivolous and self-indulgent. This thesis starts from the idea that fashion's very changeability – often considered in terms of an endless cycle of commodity circulation – is precisely the characteristic that provides the open door to ugliness. That is, ugliness is consumed via fashion's revolving set of values. This feature alone makes fashion worthy of study and as a result, this thesis argues that it is fashion's special qualities, its status of perpetual uncertainty, that triggers a dialectic when concepts of beauty in fashion are challenged. Deconstruction insists that we take what exists as a coherent whole and discern constituent parts that are in themselves oppositional, thus the dialectic at work here shuffles between the positive values of making and the treacherous values of destroying.[40] Late in the twentieth century, popular culture repeatedly slashed, spoiled, and distressed clothing to render it of renewed vitality. High fashion has worked more analytically to offer a prolonged

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[37] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 4.
[38] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 5.
[39] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 15.
[40] Martin and Koda *Infra-apparel* 96. Deconstruction is the name which was given by French philosopher Jacques Derrida to an approach which rigorously pursues the meaning of a text to the point of undoing the oppositions on which it is apparently founded.

interest in apparel. Here destruction, in light of Derrida, becomes a process of analytical creation.[41]

Whereas fashion's drive keeps us in a constant embrace with changing styles, this thesis has at its centre the question: "What happens when modern fashion is no longer driven by beauty and glamour?" Arguably, the rise of what we call fashion and its liberation of beauty from classical canons occurred simultaneously during the nineteenth century. Umberto Eco writes, "beauty could now express itself by making opposites converge, so that ugliness was no longer the negation of beauty, but its other face".[42] Moreover, we hear repeatedly that we coexist with contrasting models of beauty "because the opposition beautiful/ugly *no longer has any aesthetic value*: ugly and beautiful would be two possible options to be experienced neutrally".[43] That is, both beauty and ugliness are made up of interdependent and complex references. Thus the thesis is a tour through what will be called "apparent ugliness" and the spectrum of ugliness in fashion as a way to discuss our relationship with style and our social bodies. In parallel, the thesis tracks the changing way we think about our clothes and their state of appearance.

Structurally, the ensuing chapters explore the concept of apparent ugliness as the positive reformation of holes, stains and tears, and the clothing of the lower classes in fashion. An apparent ugliness is the historical supplement, I argue, behind the current trend for poor looks. This redrawing of the traditional aesthetic drivers of fashion make dressing poor a complex field of study. At its heart, ugliness reconfigures those features deliberately kept at fashion's margins as not only as rational, but even high street style.

What then, as we launch into a thesis exploring fashion and ugliness, is fashion? Does it make sense to identify fashion with a beautiful dress and what would be classified unfashionable with an ugly or spoiled one? Is the distinction based on purely aesthetic criteria? What is beauty in relation to dress, which we are

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[41] Martin and Koda *Infra-apparel* 94.
[42] Umberto Eco (ed) *History of Beauty* (Trans. Alastair McEwen) (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004) 321.
[43] Eco (ed) *History of Beauty* 426. (Eco's emphasis).

calling the protagonist of fashion's changability? How many dimensions can it have? And is ugliness simply the other side of beauty or does it have its own characteristics that might be revealed when discussed in relation to dressing poor? These are the questions that present themselves in formulating a critique of fashion as we know it and the catalyst for this thesis. Thus the thesis is a hermeneutic study: it wants to interpret ugliness in fashion. In exposing the mechanics of fashion, in revealing the seams as it were of those traditional drivers of fashion – beauty and glamour – we see the destruction of the illusion of fashion and an unknotting of many of the certainties around how and why we dress the way we do. Thus dressing poor represents a wilful instability in its relationship to beauty and offers an alternative way to think through the history of fashion.

Chapter 1. Apparent Ugliness

In the *Poetics* (c. 335 BC), Aristotle explores a principle still universally accepted today and one essential for understanding ugliness in fashion: that is it possible to make beautiful imitations of ugly things.[44] As I will show, using the examples in the imaginary wardrobe, the meeting of the opposing forces of beauty and ugliness is in part the definition of what we might describe as "apparent ugliness" and its continual reappearance as a fashion trend called "dressing poor". Examples of dressing poor in high-end fashion are plentiful and the most significant approximate ugliness which I will show to be a broad, overarching feature that is of interest to designers and consumers precisely because of its relativity to beauty. Dressing poor also feeds the increasingly fine distinctions that signal one's knowingness of fashion's codes and ironies. Indeed, it is the very fragility of the dialectic between beauty and ugliness that makes their meeting in fashion so compelling. The very lack of harmony between these two forces is the dynamic at the core of my investigation.

Ugliness in fashion is most clearly evident in the appropriation or mimicry of the garb of the working classes and in garments that imitate filth or being old and hard-worn. Indeed it is specifically the strategy of quotation of poverty in dressing poor that differentiates the look from actual poverty. In searching out examples of dressing poor so as to better understand the role of ugliness in fashion, we find that it is in fact one of fashion's less recognised, but nonetheless, key concepts. Fashion's slipperiness means that what is aesthetically unacceptable or "unbeautiful" today is regularly satisfactory tomorrow. Similarly, in a suitable context that which is considered ugly on its

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[44] Umberto Eco [ed] *On Ugliness* [trans. Alastair McEwen] (London: Harvill Secker, 2007) 30.

own may become attractive when reformulated in a new and different whole. Understanding these nuances is crucial to understanding ugliness, which in turn helps us to get at a more rigorous understanding of fashion itself. As fashion historian James Laver discussed in his famous timeline of acceptability in dress, any fashion which is considered to be beautiful now will only be widely deemed as beautiful again 150 years after its first appearance. In between now and then, it will be judged as dowdy, hideous, ridiculous, amusing, quaint, charming and then romantic before the cycle is complete, in that specific order.[45] While Laver's timeline was disproved in his own lifetime – cycles of fashion are must faster than he gave them credit – it nonetheless reveals the contingent nature of both beauty and ugliness in fashion.

While less acknowledged in the realm of fashion, ugliness has been common to the fine arts, particularly the avant garde (even before it was formulated as such in the late nineteenth century). Art has long reacted against public taste and aesthetic standards in the name of creativity and innovation. As academic Gilles Lipovetsky notes, art is often at war with "good taste" and regularly produces "dissonant, dislocated [and] scandalous works".[46] One example of this rupture to aesthetic standards to form an entirely new norm can be found in the work of French painter Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin. *The Skate*, 1728, is one of Chardin's best-known pictures. It is an early work from the artist's time at the Royal Académie and depicts a gutted skate or sting ray in a still life scene that includes a cat, kitchen implements and other fresh foods. The fleshy, fatty stomach of the sea animal bulges out from the rip made during its capture while pin hole eyes and a slit mouth give it a ghostly, gruesome, cartoonish look. Such a work is not for domestic consumption but for academic pleasure – the realism and technical dexterity on offer is part of the painting's charm. That is, it offers pleasure with "higher" ideals. We admire the way the artist is able to sensorially-charge paint and canvas. In Chardin's soft and tonally-muted palette the strangeness that is fundamental to the dead skate is subsumed by its bountiful and everyday context: this is a kitchen scene, the hooked fish makes sense here.

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[45] Laver and de la Haye *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* 28.
[46] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 232.

French novelist Marcel Proust admired "this strange monster" and "the beauty of its vast and delicate structure, tinted with red blood, blue nerves and white muscles, like the nave of a polychromatic cathedral".[47] In such rapturous praise Proust highlights the dual occurrence of both admiration and repugnance in the one image and the notion that it is possible to produce beautiful imitations of ugly things. "From Chardin" said Proust "we have learned … that a pear is as living as a woman, that an ordinary piece of pottery is as beautiful as a precious stone".[48] That is, with the right creative interpretation and skill, the simple and the everyday and even the plain and the unpleasant can be made beautiful.

In his recent book *On Ugliness*, Umberto Eco seeks to get to the root of ugliness, an exploration useful for our understanding of aesthetics in fashion. He writes:

> In truth, in the course of our history, we ought to distinguish between manifestations of ugliness in itself (excrement, decomposing carrion, or someone covered with sores who gives off a nauseating stench) from those of *formal ugliness*, understood as a lack of equilibrium in the organic relationship between the parts of the whole.[49]

For the most part my discussion of fashion and ugliness revolves around a strain of formal or artistic ugliness when discussing the deliberately disproportionate or the seemingly "badly" made, the stained, the ripped and the torn. At times, however, the examples of fashion drawn into this debate are also "ugly" as Eco first describes it, in the sense that they are deliberately rotting or seem to be decomposing, they are infested with insects or made from rubbish.

Chardin, like Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn and his painting *Carcass of Beef*, 1655, compliment the examples drawn from the world of fashion that will be discussed here. They are part of the debate around ugliness because their makers deliberately draw beauty and its opposites together. These artists make beautiful imitations of typically unappealing and shunned features: blood, open wounds and raw flesh. In the case of Rembrandt, this passage from ugliness to beauty and back again is paved by paint and the artist's touch and his reputation

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[47] Marcel Proust quoted in: http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/ Accessed 9.01.09
[48] http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/ Accessed 9.01.09
[49] Eco *On Ugliness* 19.

and high standing. The most potent association with this style of seventeenth-century Dutch *vanitas* painting is where meat is a common inclusion with which to reinforce the vanity of human existence. With its symbolic meanings, Dutch still-life painting brought together an intense and material concentration on the tactile surface of everyday objects. By carefully reproducing the flayed animal in fine layers of oil, a transition occurs. When depicted by Rembrandt the meat leaves it bloodied context and *becomes* an art at the intersection of beauty, the strange and twisted. The painterly circumstance is literally transformative. This is the revelation of art, an alchemy of turning the ugly into the profound.

Some centuries later, French fashion photographer Guy Bourdin appears acutely aware of this capacity for transformation via mediation. Bourdin was one the most celebrated fashion photographers of the 1960s and 70s and one of the most daring explorers of another kind of ugliness: that found in the macabre, the abject and the unexpected. Bourdin's is a Surrealist economy of shock. It is the same unsettling dynamic that drives much contemporary art. Thus my reading of Bourdin's work as knitted into an aesthetic of ugliness via morbidity is an additional reading to the now familiar dichotomy of beauty and death that surrounds interpretations of his photography.

Bourdin preferred bathrooms and shabby hotel rooms as the setting for his fashion photography. His was an image making at odds with the mainstream context for fashion more often sited in palatial rooms or exotic resorts. As the British photographer Terence Donovan recounts, "if there was an enormous hotel, and in it was a cupboard that stank and was two inches square, that's where [Bourdin] would take the picture".[50] In a now well-known shoot for *Vogue* magazine, Bourdin posed a model in a long, red tartan coat standing amongst an assembly of hanging animal carcasses. The shock-value of both Bourdin and Rembrandt's images is the same, as is the visual transference between meat and model, ugliness and beauty. While not utilizing the transformative powers of art, Bourdin's dead animals are instead recontextualized by the glossy pages of *Vogue* magazine and when joined by the

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[50] See Anthony Haden-Guest 'Annals of Photography: The Return of Guy Bourdin' The New Yorker 7 November 1994.

more typical fashion figure of the beautiful, young model, viewers are exposed to the clash of violence and vulnerability, reality and fantasy. The model and the coat are, in effect, Bourdin's paint and they assist him in transforming a van of slaughtered animals into a satisfactory context for high fashion. Bourdin, his editors and *Vogue* readers know that the ugliness of the skinned and bloodied animals emphasises the beauty of the model and her attire. Although he chooses to show the abhorrent, Bourdin uses the power and seduction of shock to reconcile distinct aesthetic forces. The image facilitates a fascination with the grotesque that rests firmly in the realm of ugliness, and reliably, radical novelty holds our gaze.

Bourdin once declared that the purest fashion photograph would be of someone dying or unconscious.[51] And certainly many of Bourdin's images can be read as a kind of *memento mori* – which literally translates from Latin as "remember you must die". Perhaps Bourdin was calling for an image of such intensity as to be almost unbearable – a visual statement on the link between beauty and death. It was French Surrealist Andre Breton (whom Bourdin admired) who linked beauty and shock when he declared "Beauty will be convulsive, or not at all".[52] Chardin, Rembrandt and Bourdin use strategies of defamiliarisation, destabilisation and shock that we will see again in the work of fashion designers approximating ugliness in a drive for unconventional looks.

Defining ugliness

In every century, philosophers, artists and designers define beauty; but few define ugliness. Most see it as the opposite of beauty.[53] Frequently, ugliness is a discordance that breaks with the rules of balance and proportion on which both physical and moral beauty is based, or it is a lack of something that society deems important. There is one principle, however, that is observed almost uniformly amongst these theories according to Umberto Eco, in an echo of Aristotle, who confirms that "although ugly things exist, art has the power to portray them in a beautiful way, and the beauty of this imitation makes ugliness

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[51] Manolo Blahnik 'The Naked and The Dead' *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine* 6 April 2003, 23.
[52] See André Breton *Nadja* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1996 [1928]).
[53] Eco *On Ugliness 8*.

acceptable".[54] It is this theory that also guides the acceptability of and desire for an apparent ugliness in fashion and which designers exploit to great effect.

But can ugliness be made acceptable and still be defined as ugly? Or is it that we are really describing something else, indeed, are we witnessing the taming of ugliness? Using the logic of Eco, beautifully made holes and artfully produced stains makes these typically "imperfect" and undesirable aspects of clothing into satisfactory features. The reality, however, is that these features only *look* like the worn-through holes and unintentional stains that would typically be rejected. When deliberately created by fashion designers they undergo a kind of social transformation. Once re-presented and repackaged, designer-made holes, stains are tears are trans-coded and re-signified for consumers. Reproduced as high fashion, dressing "poor" is by definition a remarkable coalescing of the concepts of both beauty and ugliness.

The union of beauty and ugliness draws on a notion of poverty that can be substituted by other descriptors such as resourcefulness, inventiveness, anti-ostentation, impudence and the unconventional. Needless to say, these descriptors are typically understood as positive qualities and contribute to the rethinking of fixed positions for beauty and ugliness. Not only does the poor aesthetic in fashion make ugliness inoffensive, it can be shown to be socially and politically necessary during periods of recession and shortages.

Interpreting the poor look

Literally "trying on" poor looks has a long history and derives, in part, from a desire to prepare oneself for possible privations. French philosopher Michel Foucault illustrates the imitation of poor looks as far back as ancient Rome. He recounts Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca's description of brief training periods of "fancied poverty", undertaken each month by individuals voluntarily placing themselves "within the confines of destitution".[55] For three or four days one experienced "a bed of straw, coarse clothing and bread of the lowest quality'" in order to demonstrate control over the body and to dispense with the taste for

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[54] Eco *The History of Beauty* 133.

[55] Michel Foucault *The Care of the Self, The History of Sexuality Volume 3* [trans. Robert Hurley] (London and New York: Penguin, 1984 [1984]) 60.

ostentation.[56] As Foucault notes of the Stoic lifestyle, "one makes oneself familiar with the minimum" so as to prepare oneself for possible future misfortune.[57] The Romans had drawn something from their ancient Greek ascendants, who, inured by their poverty could not so easily be bribed and could live outside the formal collectives of the city and therefore outside rule.[58] Thus independence and self-reliance became respected qualities. According to Lewis Mumford in *The City in History*, poverty was not an embarrassment in ancient Greece but, rather, quoting *The Government of Athens*, "Athenians everywhere give more weight to the less higher class."[59] Consequently, Stoic philosophy, defined by a will in accord with nature's up and down rhythm, acknowledges that imperfections contribute to the satisfaction and harmoniousness of a whole life. In light of this, the experience of irregularly dressing in crude and low quality clothing made one's customary attire all the more appealing when looked at as a complete wardrobe.

This simple encounter with the notion of beauty's other wasn't an isolated experience. It carried a more fundamental message and existed within a broader framework of understanding the aesthetic spectrum. Thus, as Roman Emperor and Stoic Marcus Aurelius recognised in the split crust of a loaf of bread and the almost rotten look of a piece of ripe fruit: imperfection or ugliness is redeemed by context. Frequently, such radical changes to the aesthetic continuum are brought about by a shifting context around ugliness, a shift that is created by artists and designers in hand with consumers.

How are poor looks determined?

Historically, social station has been defined by the quality of our dress; the choice of fabric and its condition, as well as its form. Costume historians agree that across most of Europe between the fifth and the eleventh centuries, Christian asceticism continued to influence the way men and women dressed.[60] Loose robes were worn by both sexes, styles were simple and unchanging. Dress

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[56] Foucault *The Care of the Self* 59-60.
[57] Foucault *The Care of the Self* 60.
[58] See Lewis Mumford *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects* (Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, 1961)
[59] Mumford *The City in History* 196.
[60] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 18.

distinguished rich from poor, rulers from ruled, only in that working people wore more wool and no silk, rougher materials and with less ornamentation than their masters.[61]

By the fourteenth century clothing had come to be so intimately associated with status assertions that sumptuary laws were enacted throughout Europe. Commoners were forbidden to consume fabrics and styles that the aristocracy sought to reserve for themselves. Those outside nobility were forced to "dress down".[62] Sumptuary laws attempted to dictate that grooms, servants and the employees of urban craftsmen should only wear cheap woollen cloth. These laws aimed to restrict what individuals might wear by legal means. The regulations represented an attempt to preserve the distinctions in economic rank, creating a situation where every garment worn in the medieval period became a kind of uniform, visually reiterating the social order. Such laws, however practically ineffective they were, nevertheless illustrate a recognition within medieval society of the power of dress as a communicator of station and a longing for that power to be manifested through a clearly defined system of priorities based on social position as an indicator of wealth.[63] From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, it began to seem shameful to wear outdated clothes, and those who could afford to do so discarded their clothing simply because it had gone out of style and not because it showed any sign of wear and tear.[64] New and, therefore fresh and clean, clothing helped mark class distinctions as constantly changing styles meant the wearer fled from decay.

So widespread was this development that Shakespeare could write in 1600 in *Much Ado About Nothing*, that "fashion wears out more apparel than the man".[65] It was normal at this time, for a peasant to wear grey or brown clothes

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[61] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 18.

[62] Davis *Fashion, Culture and Identity* 58. Davis also notes that while such laws usually had little effect by remained on the statute books in many places until well into the eighteenth century.

[63] Christopher Breward *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) 27.

[64] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 20.

[65] From William Shakespeare *Much Ado About Nothing*. First published in 1600, first performed in the winter of 1598-1599. Quoted in Valerie Steele. *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1997) 3.

made of rough natural fabrics, not dyed, threadbare, and almost always filthy.[66]
This led to a situation which persisted for several hundred years, whereby the
humbler classes attempted to dress fashionably but out of necessity continued
to wear styles that had long ceased to be fashionable amongst the rich.[67] Ever
since, second-hand dress has been associated with low economic status and low
class, frequently "a symbol of poverty and lower class oppression and
patronage".[68]

According to Julian Stallabrass, the aesthetic qualities of a garment appear
"only as functions shrivel…the operation of commodity culture and all its
products acts to sever people from one another, leaving the poorest to dwell
among its discarded goods".[69] Thus, for almost the next five hundred years, the
rich could be identified by the neatness and cleanliness of their constantly
updated dress, while the lower classes wore their hand-me-downs, binding the
richest and poorest in an accidental intimacy through the recycling of
extravagance.[70] Today, examples of this life-extending handiwork shows
evidence of remaking and tracks a kind of garment archeology or a palimpsest
of stitching where the wearer would be fully cognizant, if not responsible, for the
rejuvenation of their clothing through a continual process of mending. Arguably
then, for those who can afford it, the appeal of continuously changing styles is
the desire for newness as a kind of freshness that inextricably links fashion's
form with its state of appearance.

Even today, sumptuary laws exist but in varying forms. In 2004, the US State of
Louisiana forbade the wearing of low-rider jeans that revealed the wearer's
underpants. Louisiana House Criminal Justice Committee approved House Bill
1626, also known as the "Baggy Pants Bill" which states: "It shall be unlawful for
any person to appear in public wearing his pants below his waist and thereby
exposing his skin or intimate clothing."[71] Those caught risked a fine of US $500.

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[66] Eco *History of Beauty* 106.
[67] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 20.
[68] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 249.
[69] Julian Stallabrass *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* (London, New York: Verso 1996)
186.
[70] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 20.
[71] http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4963512/ Accessed 4.07.08

Many bars, pubs and clubs across Australia also control their patronage through dress codes. Standard codes commonly disallow footwear such as thongs (mostly for men) and make ties and shirt collars obligatory. These localized laws, unlike sumptuary laws, attempt to homogenize but they also desire for their customers to project the sensation of newness and freshness associated with the elegance of formal and "proper" dress and the concept of beauty.[72]

For sociologist Georg Simmel, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, this notion of freshness is also linked to newness as it relates to fashion's traditional drivers – beauty and elegance. He writes:

> What is really elegant … always lays a more general, stylised, almost abstract sphere around man – which, of course, prevents no finesse from connecting the general with the personality. That new clothes are particularly elegant is due to the still being 'stiff'; they have not yet adjusted to the modifications of the individual body as fully as older clothes have, which have been worn, and are pulled and pinched by the peculiar movements of their wearer.[73]

Thus for Simmel, "stiffness" or newness, is not just an abstract desire fulfilled by wearing the latest fashion, but literally new clothes have a psychological effect on those who encounter them. New clothes, still without connection to the wearer's body, seem to carry their very own voice. As Simmel notes, new clothes give the wearer a kind of stylised aura, an "abstract sphere" of precise faultlessness. On the other hand, individuality in dress – characterised by wear and tear or the "pulled and pinched" trait of older clothes – is a negative characteristic. Stiffness, a near robotic starched, clean, freshness is pure elegance. Where there is stiffness there is order. Where there is stiffness, there are no stains, no holes, no dirt. This a modernist take on beauty where clothing creates an aura around a person and in part wants to define their character – a situation where appearances account for everything. Postmodernism, on the other hand, takes a sceptical approach to appearances and sees them as

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[72] Beards and facial hair has also been subject to regulation, notably during the mid twentieth century for Walt Disney employees. The ban on facial hair, originally instituted in 1957 by mustachioed Walt Disney himself, was intended to help set Disneyland apart as a friendly, family-oriented amusement park, unlike many of the questionable fairgrounds and eerily groomed carnies of the day.
[73] Kurt H. Wolff (ed) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: The Free Press 1950) 341.

fragmented, offering mixed meanings and only partial views. Through the prism of postmodernism, we can understand the notion of ugliness as an increasingly complex aesthetic with multiple visual cues that need to be individually unpacked.

Following Simmel, ugliness is common when too much of the particular or the exceptional – the individualisation of clothes – starts to appear in the garb of the wearer.[74] He explains:

> A long-worn piece of clothing almost grows to the body; it has an intimacy that militates against the very nature of elegance, which is something for the 'others', a social notion deriving its value from general respect.[75]

Thus for Simmel, shiny elbows, sweat stains, overly occupational dress and certain sorts of fabrics could all damage the wearer's social standing.[76] Indeed, these clothes also become a mouthpiece for how the wearer is to be treated socially. Similarly, in 1936 while working in Alabama with photographer Walker Evans, writer James Agee wrote about the sharecroppers they encountered as part of a government-funded documentary project around the great depression. In the resulting book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Agree writes in a section subtitled "Shoes", describing the footwear of the sharecroppers:

> They have visibly though to the eye subtly taken the mold of the foot, and structures of the foot are printed through them in dark sweat at the ankles, and at the roots of the toes. They are worn without socks, and by experience of similar shoes I know that each man's shoe, in long enough course of wear, takes as his clothing does the form of his own flesh and bones ... So far as I could see, shoes are never mended. They are worn out like animals to a certain ancient stage and chance of money at which a man buys a new pair.[77]

Agee's description recalls Simmel's analysis of the clothing of the poor and working growing to their bodies, taking something of their form. These

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[74] Carter *Fashion Classics* 64.
[75] Wolff (ed) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* 341.
[76] Carter *Fashion Classics* 47.
[77] James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Know Praise Famous Men* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press: 1941 [1939]) 270.

garments *become* poor too – they are an extension of the wearer. It is a kind of uniform or even perhaps a kind of tangled up portrait as the sharecropper's shoes, in a sense, *perform* poverty. It is clear who the shoes belong to as Agee outlines it: the connection reconfirms man and shoe as both being poor; however noble, they are one and the same.

For Simmel, dressing elegantly is a rite purely for the respectable and a pointer to the wearer's knowledge of social codes, a desire to publicly conform to them and to signal differentiation from those not privy to such codes. For Simmel, fashion is fundamentally based on class.[78] Thus, fashion dictates that the lower classes will look to the upper classes and recognise their higher station when they recognise the comparative inelegance of their own dress. According to Simmel, this means the poor are not to be given the same respect as those who wear clothes that are clean, neat and rigidly new.

Simmel lived in a world bound by military dress codes and their impact on men's fashion design of the period. When properly exhibited, these codes inflicted a shell-like hardness on garments and imparted a strength and healthiness that made the wearer's clothes sit seemingly independent of the body. It was a look in sharp contrast to the sloppy, slovenly and unruly lower class. Thus this lowly body itself is part of the equation of inelegance, a kind of visual ugliness, which is also publicly formed. Contra Simmel, and in light of our postmodern age of irony, we see that his theory no longer pertains outright, as to follow Simmel's logic would be to read the trend for dressing poor at face value only, thus reading it too literally.

Part of Simmel's problem with holes, stains and tears in clothes is that these features represent confusion and even anarchy. Dirt, in particular, is a critical and meaningful feature if left unchecked: dirty smears signal the breaching of a taboo. As Mary Douglas claims, following Sigmund Freud, dirt is a social problem because dirt represents disorder. Our desire to eliminate dirt is the sign of an active effort to organise the environment. Douglas writes:

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[78] Ulrich Lehmann *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Mass., and London: MIT Press Cambridge 2000) 154.

> We can recognise in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. It is a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing…under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be… . In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.[79]

Dirty stains encourage garments to rile against the system of elegance, the "ordered systems" or "cherished classifications" established by Simmel. These systems are the long-standing rules and codes upon which Douglas, and the broader community, bases their understanding of common social mores around dirt. If we shun dirt, it is not because of fear, dread or terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends, because it offends against order.[80]

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the an older and more objective definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system: it is the by-product of the classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.[81] Dirty stains *become* meaningful when they are worn, not as signs of accidents, but as a deliberate form of accessorizing.

Dirt is disorder only by comparison. Contrasts are heightened by the contemporary trend for dressing poor because dirt takes on an emblematic role, it stands alone and as a clear sign of what it is in distinction to it. When worn as a deliberate accessory, dirt becomes – to recall Douglas – a calculated and "inappropriate" element. Similarly, in his essay "History and Sociology of Clothing" Roland Barthes writes that the scruffiness or dirtiness of a worn

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[79] Mary Douglas *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1966) 35.
[80] Douglas *Purity and Danger* 2.
[81] Douglas *Purity and Danger* 35.

garment has no sociological value unless these features function as intentional signs.[82] That is, the ragged and soiled garment, worn with such features as unintentional signs, offers us no new information about social actions, processes or structures. Instead, it reproduces what structuralist semioticians refer to as a process of reality construction and maintenance where positions of inequality, dominance and subservience are permanently produced and reproduced and at the same time made to appear "natural" so that a social order is perpetually re-established. But as Barthes knows, unchecked signs of untidiness and filthiness in a garment traditionally connote homelessness, poverty and destitution. Thus, he argues, the dirty scruffy garment, worn as an intentional sign (that is, as high fashion) forms an aberrant code.[83] This style is then *de*coded by the wearer by means of yet another code from that used to originally encode it.

For example, drawing design inspiration from the style of late 1970s racing culture, Puma's Moto Lifestyle Collection of shoes, jackets, t-shirts and tops, produced since 2006, takes inspiration from the sport's culture. According to the marketing campaign:

> distressed leathers, raw edges and tonal graphic treatments [to] give a rock star attitude to this fashionable lifestyle concept. The 1000 Collection is inspired by motor sport bikes and features an ergonomic pre-angled design and a worn-out and dirty look with artificial oil spills.[84]

Thus, in Puma's collection, evidence of intense usage – namely stains and signs of wear – become an embedded image passed from the designer/company to the wearer. These features reiterate the insular class dimension of those *not* choosing to dress poor, but who have that appearance, and the distinctly different intentions of the fashion for poor looks.

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[82] Roland Barthes *The Language of Fashion*, (London and New York: Berg, 2006) 9.
[83] The notion of an aberrant code is originally discussed by Umberto Eco. See: Umberto Eco *The Open Work* Trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
[84] http://www1.eshop.puma.com Accessed 7.10.07

Ugliness and novelty

During the nineteenth century and the "the squalor of progress" with the development of factories and industry, a growing working class and widespread, atrocious living conditions, the city was thought to be ugly in relation to the beauty of the countryside.[85] According to Elizabeth Wilson it was the city itself that in turn gave birth to new ideas regarding beauty: beauty was found in ugliness, the link between beauty and "the natural" was severed and what was deemed to be "unnatural", exaggerated, even deformed, could, according to these new, industrial canons of taste, become beautiful.[86] In *Hard Times*, 1854, Charles Dickens, famous for his ability to capture the zeitgeist in fiction, describes the industrial Coketown in terms of its ugliness: its savagery, never-ending smoke coils and never-ending sameness.[87] He likens the whole place to a machine and the mill hands as its working parts, bred to live emotionless, monotonous lives: "the same hours … same sound … same pavements … same work … same as yesterday'".[88] For Simmel distancing oneself from the kind of ugliness invoked by Dickens chiefly meant disconnecting one's clothing from any connection to industry. That is, clothing should show no sign of work: no dirt, stains, tears or improper smells.

Simmel's writing echoes that of his contemporary, nineteenth century social commentator Thorstein Veblen, who claims:

> It goes without saying that no apparel can be considered elegant, or even decent, if it shows the effect of manual labor on the part of the wearer, in the way of soil or wear. The pleasing effect of neat and spotless garments is chiefly, if not altogether, due to their carrying the suggestion of leisure −exemption from personal contact with industrial processes of any kind.[89]

Like Simmel, Veblen claims that there is an impenetrable sphere around elegant dress derived from the qualities of newness. Perhaps ironically, in Veblen's terms, new clothes are in fact refined machine prothesis, artificial constructions that amplify the perfection of the body. Like the "stiffness" that Simmel

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[85] Eco *On Ugliness* 347.
[86] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 127.
[87] Charles Dickens *Hard Times* (London: Dover Press 1854) 16.
[88] Dickens *Hard Times* 16
[89] Veblen *Theory of the Leisure Class* 105.

describes, Veblen's notion of elegance is based on cleanliness, freshness and even a sense of being so new as to be seemingly untouched. To be elegant, according to Veblen, our dress should suggest a life of inactivity and complete removal from the machinations of industry:

> It may be remarked that, considered simply in their physical juxtaposition with the human form, the high gloss of a gentleman's hat or patent-leather shoe has no more of intrinsic beauty than a similarly high gloss on a threadbare sleeve; and yet there is no question but that all well-bred people … instinctively and unaffectedly cleave to the one as a phenomenon of great beauty, and eschew the other as offensive to every sense… It is extremely doubtful if any one could be induced to wear such as contrivance as the high hat of civilized society, except for some urgent reason based on other than aesthetic grounds.[90]

As Veblen notes above, the difference between the acceptability of the glossy hat and the shiny shoe and the "inelegance" of the shiny sleeve is that the latter results from labouring undertaken by the coat's wearer while the sheen on the hat or shoe result from polishing and other "useless" practices related to elegance.[91] This is beauty conceived as the admirably unproductive: it is flawless and blank with an absence of lack.[92] That is, the high gloss on the hat or shoe is the sign of the fleeting lustre of newness that is recaptured endlessly through the purchase of new items. Simultaneously, the tarnished sheen of the threadbare sleeve connotes the garment's passing beyond fashion's "speeded-up" timeframes and into the zone of inelegance. In turn, the high gloss of the hat and shininess of the shoe is also symbolic of bourgeois superiority: a world unmoved by perfectly gleaming footwear would signal a society of mixed-up values, following Veblen's logic.

Veblen's claims around the appearance of inelegant garments and their association with labour, due to their revealing the signs of wear and tear, were reiterated within the market during the nineteenth century by second hand clothes dealers. When the new industrial processes had given refuse itself a certain post-consumer use value, rag pickers appeared in the cities in larger

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[90] Veblen *Theory of the Leisure Class* 81.
[91] Carter *Fashion Classics* 47.
[92] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (New York: Allworth Press 1999) 80.

numbers. They worked for middlemen and constituted a cottage industry located in the streets and, like prostitutes, they existed at the margins of society. In Britain, "the lowest and weakest of the citizens" of the newly industrialised city were the "scavengers, rag-pickers and pedlars" who inhabited the slums and rookeries of central London.[93] This secondary market dealt explicitly with the other side of elegance – the sign of the working body in garments that had pushed and pulled the fabric, embedding in it such features as sweat, oil stains and folds in sleeves rolled up too long. Without care for his or her appearance, the worker in filthy togs is deemed a brute; too uneducated, too lowly to avoid the fact that the appearance of his or her clothing makes messages. It is therefore immensely ironic that today the wrinkles and creases in garments such as denim jeans are part of mainstream fashion and acceptable attire in many workplaces. Indeed, as we have seen, many of the same features that were once shunned – holes, stains, tears and cheap fabrics – now represent fashion kudos.

Knowledge of what was, and what was not, socially agreeable regarding clothes, was so widespread during the nineteenth century that clothes-makers and repairers referred to the wrinkles in the elbow of a sleeve as "memories".[94] Too many memories reduced the value of garment. Taking this to a more literal conclusion, Peter Stallybrass writes, "memories were thus inscribed for the poor within objects that were haunted by loss [and] in a constant state of being-about-to-disappear".[95] That is, garments with signs of wear and tear are also replete with signs of a loss of social standing. These elements denote a connection with labouring and the lower classes and even, as Stallybrass suggests, the sense that these clothes are so threadbare and so worthless that they will soon completely disintegrate from the wearer's back.

Veblen's negative, near pathological response to the lustre of thinning tatters recalls Julia Kristeva's writing on abjection where hair, toe nail clippings, vomit,

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[93] Caroline Evans 'The Golden Dustman: A Critical Evaluation of the Work of Martin Margiela and a review of *Martin Margiela: Exhibition (9/4/1615)' Fashion Theory*, Volume 2, Issue 1: 83
[94] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 257.
[95] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 257.

dirt and stains, are psychologically offensive, just as Veblen describes.[96] However, for Kristeva, such stains or blemishes on our clothes are acknowledged not as signs of me, the wearer, but they are "not nothing, either".[97] That is, the bits of the body that fall off, and leave personalised "calling cards" in the world after we have been there, and which destroy elegance, are what Kristeva defines as the abject. Abjection is thus closely related to "apparent ugliness", when such signs appear in fashion. Simmel comes close to describing the abject when he portrays inelegance as the sign of the body as if it has grown into, and become part of, the individual's wardrobe. These elements of abjection are disembodied from us, but contain our DNA, and in their finger-printed detachedness become horrific. The shiny sleeve is abject, since it carries that which the body exudes as waste – reappearing as the shine – and thus paradoxically carries a palpably live deadness. As Kristeva notes, the abject is not an object but a cultural safeguard, and in this case the abject is the sight of a texture, the embedded characteristic on the surface of a textile added there by the body through wear and open for all to see if not kept in check.[98]

It is not dirt and stains or even a general lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, rather the fact that these elements disturb a strict social and sartorial system of the kind outlined by Simmel and Veblen which is still active today. As the latter writes, we as "civilised society" will "instinctively and unaffectedly cleave away" from features such as stains that upset order. These so-called disturbing characteristics of clothing do not respect the borders, positions or rules of socially-acceptable dress and, as Veblen reminds us, instead instil a kind of phobia when encountered by others.[99]

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[96] See Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

[97] Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 2.

[98] Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 4.

[99] In using the terms "instinctively" and "unaffectedly", Veblen recalls philosopher Immanuel Kant who, in his Critique of Judgement, asserts that the basis of all aesthetic experiences is the dispassionate pleasure produced from the contemplation of beauty. Kant's philosophy offers us a curious problematic. For Kant, beauty is a quality of the objects we perceive as beautiful and it pleases in an objective way. There are no personal conditions on which an object is deemed beautiful, rather, it is a universal truth, that everyone must (or ought to) share. For Kant, we will know beauty when we see it. It is a logic clearly deemed to be held by those of a certain social standing, background and education and one we have also seen in other forms from Simmel and Veblen. Kant's ambition was to combat what one might call a pluralism of taste, by which is meant the common and somewhat cynical view that beauty is in the mind of the beholder and that differences in taste are relative to differences in beholders' minds. According to Arthur C.

Value and novelty

The logic of fashion can be described as the clash of the attractive and the ephemeral.[100] The ephemeral guarantees newness or freshness through renewal which is the key to beauty and thus also key to sartorial elegance. Equally for Veblen, the desire to consume the latest fashions is to participate in the strive for beauty as it exists in newness and to continually avoid the old and ugly. It is a motivation embedded in the more general drive for novelty which Veblen sees as the abandonment of the new for the still newer. He puts it this way:

> this requirement of novelty is the underlying principle of the whole of the difficult and interesting domain of fashion. Fashion does not demand continual flux and change simply because that way of doing is foolish; flux and change and novelty are demanded by the central principle of dress – conspicuous waste.[101]

Veblen's argument for the collective appeal of novelty in fashion, ensures the perpetual avoidance of decay. However, scholars such as Finkelstein see his study of fashion and pecuniary emulation as one to "dull the senses, to distract the individual from more intellectually demanding preoccupations and, in so doing, maintain the status quo".[102] Indeed, Lipovetsky has similarly argued that fashion is socially reproductive, training us to be flexible and responsive to change in a fast-changing world: "fashion socialises human beings to change and prepares them for perpetual recycling" he says.[103] That is, fashion gears consumers to accept that at one moment a dress, for example, will be widely deemed as appealing and at another moment, not necessarily far removed, that same dress will be deemed ugly because the terms on which that garment was deemed beautiful have also changed their meaning. As Eco reminds us, a medieval philosopher would have a high opinion of the form of a gothic cathedral with its pointed arches, ribbed vaults and the flying buttresses, but

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Danto, this relativism was a kind of aesthetic colonialism – the view that so-called primitive societies were simply aesthetically retrograde in their taste – which was the theoretical underpinning for the supremacist views of Western taste in what came to be Victorian Anthropology. Arguably, Kant undertook to show that beauty is and ought to be universal, the same for all.

[100] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 5.
[101] Thorstein Veblen 'The Economic Theory of Women's Dress', in Leon Ardzrooni (ed) *Essays in Our Changing Order (*New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1964) 72.
[102] Finkelstein *Slaves of Chic* 116.
[103] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 149.

when contemplating that very same cathedral, a Renaissance theoretician would deem it ugly.[104]

Form is not the only factor we need to explore in analysing proportion. Financial value is another key to understanding ugliness in fashion. In fact, simply the high value of an item of clothing may often help to classify it as beautiful. As Veblen suggests, even "without reflection or analysis, we feel that what is inexpensive is unworthy. We find things beautiful … somewhat in proportion as they are costly".[105] Political philosopher Karl Marx also argues that the possession of money may compensate for ugliness in that it allows us to "buy" beauty, and thus esteem, creating a relatively elastic bond between the beauty of an object and its cost. He writes:

> As money has the property of being able to buy anything, to take possession of all objects, it is therefore the pre-eminent object worth having … The extent of my power is as great as the power of the money I posses … What I am and what I can do is therefore not determined by my individuality in the slightest. I am ugly, but I can buy myself the most beautiful of women. Hence I am not ugly, since the effect of ugliness, its discouraging power, is annulled by money. … Does my money not transform all my defects into their opposite?".[106]

To follow Marx's logic, the high value of a shredded garment riddled with holes and blotched with stains, if it is expensive enough, can overcome the obvious associations of ugliness and become beautiful. It is precisely because it is consumed, and deemed worthy of consumption by the market and the media (in a cycle of no fixed direction), that fashion becomes acceptable. As Marx notes, the "discouraging power" or negativity of ugliness is partly annulled when associated with a high cost because, within the scope of the fashion system, it typically has a direct relationship with the status of the label sewn inside.

Surely then beauty is a flexible term and as a result it must consequently be a fickle indicator of value. In reality, what does retain value in the face of uncertainty about a garment's desirability or social acceptability is the named

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[104] Eco *On Ugliness* 10.
[105] Veblen *Theory of the Leisure Class* 101.
[106] See Karl Marx *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844 (Moscow: Pogress Publishers 1959).

designer. Brand names and fashion houses who demand high prices for garments with holes, stains and tears, and with access to fashion shows, retailers and the media, immediately confer approval, or at the very least tolerance, upon apparent ugliness. In turn, as Veblen suggests, a garment's cost – as it is linked to branding – may be the only static indicator of how it will be received socially when garments trigger atypical responses and turn what is traditionally acceptable upside down.

Fashion and status

Simmel, like Veblen, describes the catalyst for the continual consumption of fashion as the desire to forge class distinctions in his major work, *Philosophie der Mode*, 1905. It is a social drive that has been active since the fifteenth century where those who can afford to constantly update their look, do so to differentiate themselves from those who cannot. Indeed one hundred and fifty years earlier than Simmel, economist Adam Smith writing in the mid 1700s, extrapolated from this that it is the upper classes who steer fashion innovation simply because they can afford to fiscally drive fashion with their own desires.[107] But back to Simmel, who writes:

> Fashions are always class fashions, by the fact that the fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata, and are abandoned by the former at the moment when the latter begin to appropriate them. Just as soon as the lower strata begin to appropriate their style ... so the upper strata turn away from this fashion and adopt a new one, which in turn differentiates them from the broad masses. And thus the game goes merrily on.[108]

For Simmel, fashion is a form that synthesizes oppositions so imitation and differentiation occur within the same society and even within the very same item of fashion. But while he notes that a higher strata of society wants to differentiate themselves from the "broad masses", social rank means that people can differentiate amongst themselves, frequently using dress as a determining

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[107] Adam Smith 'Of the Influence of Custom and Fashion upon our Notions of Beauty and Deformity' (1759), published in Kim K. P. Johnson, Susan J. Torntore and Joanne B. Eicher (eds) *Fashion Foundations: Early Writings on Fashion and Dress* (Berg: Oxford and London, 2003) 127.
[108] Georg Simmel 'The Philosophy of Fashion' in David Frisby and Mike Featherstone *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1998) 189-90.

factor. As Eva Illouz reminds us, "It is something of a truism to point to the inner contradictions of the culture of consumption [and its ability to] cultivate differences at an increasingly microscopically individual level".[109]

In this chapter we have investigated fashion's traditional "other" in the concept of ugliness. We have come to understand it as a supplementary figure to the history of dress – a character persistent to fashion but not yet fully examined. It is an idea circulating within fashion that comes into focus in light of the spoiled, the worn, the wretched, the lowly and even the disgusting. Throughout this chapter we have also come to see the importance of "newness" in the circulation of an apparent ugliness and its continuity as the look of dressing poor. Novelty, through its role as the fuel of fashion, also guarantees that the appearance of ugliness in dress today is laced with a highly desirable, highly complex and extraordinarily captivating set of ironies.

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[109] Illiouz 'Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A new research agenda' 378.

Chapter 2. Dressing poor: Chanel to Punk

In this chapter we will more closely examine examples from the imaginary wardrobe outlined in the introduction. But before we completely open the wardrobe door and begin to take the garments out one by one, I will describe a parallel development to the concept of dressing poor. It is important that we examine this precursor, one not part of the contemporary trend being established in the early twentieth century, but it is an important moment in fashion for thinking about the *desire* to dress poor.

The earliest modern example of a fashion designer exploring poor looks which we can be found early last century during a period of global economic depression. In 1931, journalist Janet Flanner reported that French fashion designer Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel had inaugurated the "poor" style.[110] She made "luxurious poverty" famous when "she introduced the Apache sweater to the Ritz, lent elegance to the housemaid's shirt collar and sleeves, exploited the workman's scarf, and dressed queens in mechanics overalls", wrote Flanner.[111] Chanel is also credited with making the suntan fashionable at this time. The tan had long been associated with workers who toiled outdoors but in the 1920s it was reconstituted as the visible sign of those who could afford the time to spend holidays in the sun. Suddenly the tan played with the boundaries of class distinction, style and good taste. The aim of the look was to make the rich girl look like the girl in the street. It was controversional and, according to Chanel's contemporary, fashion photographer Cecil Beaton, represented a "nihilistic, anti-fashion look".[112]

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[110] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion:* 59.
[111] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion:* 59-60.
[112] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* 41.

However, it was a look that responded to the mood of the times when the desired effect for the upper classes was invisibility during the depression. Strategically, Chanel transformed what looked like workers uniforms into fashionable dresses, introduced men's cuts and fabrics such as beige locknit and grey flannel into women's wear – creating a trend that became known as "deluxe poor".[113] One of the most striking shifts in the perception of elegance was achieved in part by wearing Chanel's "little black dress". According to fashion historian Anne Hollander, the origin of the little black dress was:

> pointedly a working girl's dress. Its cut and colour connoted neither solvency nor perverse clerical diabolism but, rather, the alienation of poverty. The dress also had another manifestation of symbolic significance in black clothing: it had become the official uniform of underlings.[114]

At the hand of Chanel, this symbolically low class dress was strategically differentiated with the simple addition of pearls and high heeled shoes. It became, as *Vogue* decried, "a uniform of sorts of all women of taste".[115] Precisely by taking on the look of poverty for the upper classes, Chanel insinuates social superiority through the device of wearing the garb of lower classes.

Chanel's "poor look" thus initiates a dialogue around the significance of uniforms and the effects of designers actively taking on class distinction as a theme. All uniforms categorize society into groups. Traditionally, they homogenise and even diminish gender divisions through uncomplicated design, economical fabric and minimal tailoring. Uniforms, because of their selective fit are also often physically uncomfortable, reminding the wearer of their station. For example, the infamous scrambled arrow pattern found on prison uniforms was created in England to quickly identify the men bound for transport to Australia at the end of the eighteenth century.[116] This uniform enforced a moral distinction. As Veblen notes, uniforms are "an item of vicarious consumption, and the repute which accrues from [their] consumption is to be imputed to the

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[113] Iris Ashley 'Coco' in Ruth Lynam (ed.) *Couture* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972) 119.
[114] See Hollander *Seeing Through Clothes*.
[115] http://www.famous-women-and-beauty.com/coco-chanel-designs.html Accessed 3.12.09
[116] Crane *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* 87.

absent master, not to the servant."[117] To that effect, uniforms offer a simple, symbolic checkpoint for placing one another into socio-economic, competency and power hierarchies.

Fashion historian Diana Crane also notes that uniforms proliferated in the West during the second half of the nineteenth century to make it easier to identify members of the working class.[118] Maids, postmen, policemen, firemen as well as rail, shop and factory workers dressed simply in unadorned garments that represented a form of social control while also contextualising the content of interpersonal communication between servant and master.[119] Today, as work environments shift toward the dominance of knowledge and service economies, uniforms are but one sign of growing social divisions and a complex indicator of status. For example, "casual Friday" at the office (the discarding of the formal uniform) proposes the loosening of hierarchies while, alternatively, state school uniforms seek a deliberate homogeneity – a level playing field – amongst children with varied social and cultural backgrounds and financial means.[120]

Chanel's class-consciousness had a lasting impact. The bourgeoisie came to accept once-reviled materials, such as jersey, and the colour black, as essential elements of modern fashion design. Chanel had made dressing poor fashionable and advised her wealthy clients to dress "as plainly as their maids"[121] and to wear their priceless jewellery "as if it were junk".[122] After Chanel, it was rarely chic to appear flamboyantly rich.[123] She popularised the concept of irony, as a form of novelty, into fashion and initiated one of the most significant shifts in our understanding of beauty and "good taste".[124]

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[117] Veblen *Theory of the Leisure Class* 109.
[118] Crane *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* 87.
[119] Crane *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* 87
[120] "Casual Friday" began in the late 1950s originally as an attempt to raise worker morale in the new white-collar office environment. At that point only a few companies encouraged it, and it was not widely popular. In the late 1970s, when the production of cheap clothing outside the United States became more widespread, there was a massive campaign by large clothing producers to make casual Friday a weekly event. It was the hope of these companies that they could undermine the formal clothing industries in Europe and create more of a market for their goods produced in cheap Third World factories.
[121] Davis *Fashion Culture and Identity* 63.
[122] Francine du Plessix 'The Escape from Fashion' *The Dial 2* No. 9 September 1981: 43-47.
[123] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 60.
[124] Marie Antoinette, for example, became fascinated with dressing poor as an antidote to her spectacularly affluent life and adopted very simple, peasant-style dress. The garment became

Charlie Chaplin

The power of clothes to indicate class status is popularly highlighted by Charlie Chaplin's bumbling vagrant character The Little Tramp. Dressed in a clown-like outfit, The Little Tramp wears baggy pants, a too-tight dirty suit jacket and large shoes, all covered in a permanent layer of dust. The Tramp even walks strangely and uncomfortably because of his ill-fitting, mis-matched second hand clothes. He underscores the dehumanising effects of the social abjection within the modern state but cheekily encourages an alternative order of values. As one of the best-known silent film makers and actors, Chaplin understood the power of clothes and their role in the delivery of clear and resounding messages about social status. The Little Tramp's station is clear because his down-and-out clothes speak volumes. As we have learnt from Simmel and Veblen, and as we see played out in Chaplin's films such as *A Dog's Life* (1918), *The Kid* (1921) and *Modern Times* (1936), dirty, ill-fitting, over-sized, second hand clothes equal low status.

However, Chaplin overrides bourgeois morality with his commitment to an alternative order of values. Typically, what society cannot assimilate it must reject.[125] Chaplin takes the social abjection that exists within the modern state, born most noticeably in his clothes, and suggests that it is in fact the superficial social values tied up in dress, and not just the outfit itself, which is decaying. Chaplin's anti-authoritarian stance embalmed by The Little Tramp's second hand dress remains a strong motif for the enduring interest in dressing poor as a fashion statement because of its political associations and sense of rebellion.

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known as *chemise a la reine* and, as a result, wearing such attire, as well as the construction of artificial villages became a popular activity among French aristocratic ladies, keen to experience a rural idyll in the comfort of their own estates. It was a look that corresponded with a then-popular, Rousseau-inspired return to nature and the contemporary philosophies of naturalism. But as curators Richard Martin and Harold Koda argue in their exhibition catalogue to the exhibition *Infra-Apparel*, the style is inappropriate to the Queen, indeed some even referred to *chemise a la reine* as fit only for prostitutes. As the pair note, "For the queen to appear and to be given an image in what was heretofore a kind of undress requires a transmogrification of the apparel's significance." Thus in wearing this chemise-like, white muslin Empire dress, Marie Antoinette decreased the privacy of the interface between body and clothing. She momentarily abandons her high social station by discarding the outer layers of body-shaping and rich materials and dresses in a mode far below her station.

[125]Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York, Zone 1997) 236.

Likewise, for post-Marxist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negi, poverty is the name given to a condition experienced by those willing to sell their labour for the lowest price. That is, the poor are those who are most alienated from their own labour power. As is strikingly played out in *Modern Times*, the Little Tramp's relationship to labour emphasises a distinction that determines his ability, or rather inability, to distance himself from the production treadmill which in turn determines his social standing.[126] In their book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri write:

> The only non-localizable "common name" of pure difference in all eras is that of the poor. The poor is destitute, excluded, repressed, exploited— and yet living! It is the common denominator of life, the foundation of the multitude ... the poor is in a certain respect an eternal postmodern figure: the figure of a transversal, omnipresent, different, mobile subject; the testament to the irrepressible aleatory character of existence. ... Finally today, in the biopolitical regimes of production and in the processes of postmodernization, the poor is a subjugated, exploited figure, but nonetheless a figure of production. This is where the novelty lies. Everywhere today, at the basis of the concept and the common name of the poor, there is a relationship of production.[127]

The novelty or irony at the core of Hardt and Negri's understanding of poverty is that those least able to obtain commodities are those who predominately produce them. It is an irony played out only too clearly by the dressing poor impulse; where the rich choose to wear expensive versions of clothes that would otherwise be deemed to belong to the poor.

As Veblen describes it, one's distance from the visible signs of effort involved in production is thus also a defining element of the upper classes who, in order to maintain their pecuniary superiority, must unproductively consume time as the evidence of their wealth. Indeed, In Plato's *Meno* (turn of the fourth century BC), Meno explains to Socrates that there is a relationship between money and

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[126] In *Modern Times* the Tramp and his fellow workers sweat on the factory line while their boss relaxes, reading the newspaper. The Tramp toils anxiously, unable to match the pace required by the unforgiving assembly line and, in one famous scene, is "eaten up" by the machine on which he works and is spun around its giant cogs. The impossibility of keeping up with the speed of the machine's production and the demands of his unmoved superiors ultimately drives the Tramp into a state of madness. His struggle is a comment on the desperate employment and fiscal conditions many people faced during the Great Depression, conditions created, in Chaplin's view, by the "efficiencies" of modern industrialization.

[127] Hardt and Negri *Empire* 156-7.

virtue. In order to be virtuous, he claims, one had to be very rich, and poverty was inevitably a personal failing rather than an accident.[128] It reminds us that wealth, exclusivity and creativity – three of the basic ingredients of fashion – so often depend on the poor, resourceful masses.[129] For Marx, the philosophical catalyst for Hardt and Negri's thinking – the possibility that one may give up ownership of one's own labour — one's capacity to transform the world — is tantamount to being alienated from one's own nature; it is a spiritual loss.[130]

Marx described this loss in terms of commodity fetishism, in which the things that people produce appear to have a life and movement of their own to which humans and their behaviour merely adapt.[131] This loss also disguises the fact that the exchange and circulation of commodities is the outcome and reflection of social relationships among people. Under capitalism, social relationships of production, such as among workers or between capitalists and workers, or the rich and poor, are mediated through commodities, including labour, that are bought and sold on the market. Poverty and unemployment is in the end the primary and immediate force that creates and maintains the segmentations between rich and poor. Importantly for this thesis, the changes that characterize post industrial capitalism and the postmodern city from the nineteenth century city since Dickens are the same changes that affect fashion. It is a contradiction described by dress historian Elizabeth Wilson who writes:

> 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 dreadful wastefulness; the ambiguity of our identity, of the relation to self to body and self to the world; and the ambiguity of art, its purpose and meaning.[132]

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[128] Quoted in Alain de Botton *The Consolations of Philosophy* (London: Penguin 2000) 19.
[129] Robin Givhan 'The Problem With Ugly Chic' in Andrew Ross (ed.) *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers* (New York and London: Verso 1997) 274.
[130] See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *The Communist Manifesto* Introduction David Harvey (London: Pluto Press, 2008) [1848].
[131] Jacques Derrida *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New international* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) 12.
[132] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 14.

Neoliberalism suggests that poverty is a state from which we must choose to flee through our own personal will, guided by hard work.[133] The progressive dismantling of the welfare state in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, and with it the abandonment of responsibilities toward the disadvantaged and the socially excluded has arguably created a self-satisfied tolerance for a 'noble' labouring poor and stylised images of poverty which in part forms the basis for the visualisation of the dressing poor trend. As Martin describes, and with a shift to a meritocratic service-age, today there appears to be a nostalgia for the non-threatening poor and a loss of sympathy for those whose lives have become dominated by drugs or other circumstances that have made the homeless population seemingly more volatile, lethal, and frightening than the benign hobo characterised by Chaplin.[134] The Little Tramp is a vagabond hero in his relentless optimism, even when down on his luck, who has no contemporary equivalent. Chaplin both critiques capitalism and represents its enduring myths of optimism and self worth.

As we have seen so far, in these first two proto examples of the trend for dressing poor from Chanel and Chaplin, the contemporary look and the aesthetics of ugliness is a kind of "message fashion". That is, to dress poor is to express a personal ideology, arguably more than other trends because of the broader social implications of this style. Chaplin dresses poor in order to give him the mobility required to tell to the stories of the under class and to upset the social order by showing it to be cruel and inequitable. His dress takes him places he could not otherwise operate. On the other hand, Chanel's desire to dress poor is also a form of rebellion, but its effect is deliberately limited. Chanel's designs play at dressing poor and indeed only act to further distinguish the wearer from the lower classes. For Chanel's clients, the apparent ugliness in her fashion is

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[133] Neoliberalism is a 'market driven' approach to economic and social policy based on neoclassical theories of economics that maximise the role of the private business sector in determining the political and economic priorities of the state. The term "neoliberalism" has also come into wide use in cultural studies to describe an internationally prevailing ideological paradigm that leads to social, cultural, and political practices and policies that use the language of markets, efficiency, consumer choice, transactional thinking and individual autonomy to shift risk from governments and corporations onto individuals and to extend this kind of market logic into the realm of social and affective relationship.
[134] Martin 'Destitution and Deconstruction' 6.

just "a look" and not an enforced way of life, making it an important precursor to the contemporary commodified trend.

Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren: Punk

Fast forward to two of the most crucial exponents of what I'm calling ugly fashion: British fashion designers Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren. Now we start to unpack our wardrobe. Many of their co-produced designs sit conceptually between the examples of Chanel and Chaplin. While Westwood and McLaren play at dressing poor like Chanel, their costume-like designs are politically motivated, moving them closer to the aims of Chaplin. The British pair were middle class, even if living 'on the edge' and operating from the inside of the punk movement. Arguably, punk is a motivating force behind all the examples I will draw under the umbrella of fashion and ugliness produced since the 1970s. Punk in Britain coincided with the end of an era of post-war consensus politics that preceded the rise of Thatcherism, and nearly all British punk bands, for example, expressed an attitude of angry social alienation. Economic recession instilled dissatisfaction with life among the youth of industrial Britain and the message of punk dress remained subversive, counter-cultural, rebellious, and politically outspoken. Given the central importance of this moment I will now spend some time investigating one of Westwood and McLaren's most significant garments for exploring the trend for dressing poor and the complexities around fashion and ugliness.

Between 1972 and 1974, Westwood and McLaren produced a dirty brown garment, entitled Let it Rock, as one of a number of a limited edition of tops over a period of eighteen months. This, and other similar garments with lewd imagery and texts resulted in the pair becoming well-known for using provocative imagery and the concept of "confrontational dressing".[135] In fact, Westwood and McLaren were prosecuted under the obscenity laws for "exposing to public view an indecent exhibition" for a T-shirt showing two naked cowboys. They had set a new rule for dressing that seemed to say: if the

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[135] In 1975 Westwood and McLaren were prosecuted under the obscenity laws for 'exposing to public view an indecent exhibition' for a T-shirt showing two naked cowboys. See Claire Wilcox *Vivienne Westwood* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2004) 12.

top doesn't fit, wear it. The Let it Rock top is a fashion object that captures a mood.

In visually analyzing the garment via its reproduction we see that it is barely recognizable as something intended for wearing; the pilled top is riddled with holes and stains and missing parts; one of the underarms has been reinforced with a miss-matched red cotton which also secures the neckline that has been ripped apart, giving the appearance of a scar.[136] Most of the garment's seams are exposed and indeed all the holes in the top have been sewn down around the edges using a range of incoherent threads. Some of the holes also reveal aged sweat stains in the underside of the fabric.

Four silver and black zippers "gnash" their metal teeth; three appear to be completely ineffectual as they don't expose pockets and one, if closed, would seal up the left arm hole, making the wearer look like an amputee. Black and white inky rubbings and ink tire-tracks roll right over the front of the garment, as if the top has literally been run-over in an accident. The rest of the surface is equally mistreated with scribbled signatures resembling a graffiti tag, giving the garment an overall grubby, "don't care" appearance while unidentifiable white marks resemble mould.

Most prominent are three black and white photographic patches sewn into the top, roughly cut down into arrow shapes and covered in plastic – that cheapest and tackiest of materials. The images show a topless girl, a scantily clad model and a close-up portrait. Above the close-up is another image: an unidentifiable, but clearly sexualized, bodily fragment. The photographs charge the garment with aggression, humour, power and inject the cut-rate fabric with more layers of indifference. They also recall an interest Westwood and McLaren had in the Teddy Boy look, a parody of upper-class Edwardian menswear style that aped 1950s dress.

In looking closely at the Let it Rock top confusion rules. The carelessly cut crude photographs, the indecipherable writing, the purpose of the zips and whether

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[136] Crane *Fashion and its Social Agendas* 186.

the intended wearer is male or female. While seemingly produced during that mid-century period with the words Rock 'N' Roll printed or tattooed across the top of garment, the image of a buxom magazine pin-up girl with dated, coiffed hair and the signature of that decade's darling – Bo Diddley – the top is also deliberately extemporal. It is of its time, but also *out of* time, and indeed whether that time is of the past, present or future is also unclear.[137] These 'cut ups' hint at disorder, breakdown and category confusion rendering time, gender and function up for grabs. At the same time, the top can be securely demarcated as belonging to the realm of punk: a style comfortable with uncertainty. The result is a top that doesn't know where it fits in but wants it all, it is a "mash up" of codes, signs and symbols and embodies punk's anarchic quality.

In unpacking the garment, the standard sewing notions like zips find illegitimate or subversive uses with the bare-breasted model hinting at the nipples that will be exposed if those same zips are opened. The garment is misshapen, it won't sit flat. To wear the garment, would be to wear an ill-fitting sack that wrestles with the body, indeed, the top shouts out its unpleasantness, as if the wearer's torso was swearing.[138] On its own, regardless of the actions of the individual who might wear it, the top abandons established social codes and creates a self-conscious commentary on traditional notions of modernity and taste. Even without a body inside, the garment offers an intimacy, a sense that the dirtiness isn't fabricated or sterile, but would in fact leave the wearer feeling squalid. When worn by a punk, the top becomes a surrogate accomplice to extreme behaviour.

The Let it Rock top was created when Westwood and McLaren's shop at 430 King's Road was in its Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die manifestation, reflecting a shift of interest from fifties revivalism to rockers and black urban culture. The duo stocked leather clothing adorned with zips and chains, t-shirts emblazoned with slogans and pornographic images as well as zoot suits: oversized ensembles that had been worn by black Americans in the 1930s and

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137 See Wilcox *Vivienne Westwood* 35. At the time, Westwood and McLaren were selling Fifties Rock 'n' Roll records and Ted clothes in the back of shop outfitted as a "suburban Teddy Boy's dream front room".
138 Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 114.

1940s as a declaration of freedom and self-determination, even rebelliousness, during World War II rationing.[139]

McLaren explains how t-shirts printed for a rock & roll extravaganza in the summer of 1972 were deliberately distressed and deconstructed before zips and coloured cels of nudie shots were added in the 2008 documentary *Vive Le Punk* by Richard K. Burton.[140] "It was a very painterly idea," says McLaren, who also reveals that the final flourish was to take their son Joe Corre's toy tractor, dip its wheels into the ink from a John Bull printing set and add skid-marks to give the impression that a motorcycle had run over it, "a bit like an action painting".[141] Westwood and McLaren also reveal that they would spend days working on each T-shirt. [142] A limited number were made and survive today. In the recent survey exhibition of Vivienne Westwood's work by the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Vivienne Westwood*, the Let it Rock top is represented in the catalogue by a large, full page, full-bleed image, but it is not part of the Museum collection, perhaps suggesting that the Top is either too difficult or, indeed too ugly, to collect.

The Let it Rock top sets the tone for Westwood and McLaren's subsequent punk-inspired collections and embodies an anarchic vulgarity: it refuses beauty as it refuses to be polite so that the wearer may channel the ugliness at the heart of their anger. To that end, a full spectrum of punk code exists within the top, as if it were a textbook on the subject: holes, tears, stains, suggestive imagery, crude openings and the desire to mash cultures in a "cut up" form that bring together completely different epochs and clashing social mores.[143] As the cultural theorist Dick Hebdige later noted of the punk movement, objects can be put to "illegitimate" as well as "legitimate" uses and the transformation of "humble objects" such as garbage bags, toilet chains, safety pins and zips can be appropriated or more drastically "stolen" by subcultures and made to carry layered meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance guaranteeing

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[139] See Angela McRobbie (ed) *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1989).
[140] http://rockpopfashion.com/blog/?p=86 Accessed 1.3.09
[141] http://rockpopfashion.com/blog/?p=86 Accessed 1.3.09
[142] http://rockpopfashion.com/blog/?p=86 Accessed 1.3.09
[143] Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 26.

their continued subordination.[144] For example, in the Let it Rock top zips are useful or legitimate devices when used to create openings but when they are inserted to deliberately expose sensitive parts of the body or make the garment inoperable by closing up arm holes they become illicit.

The safety pins and bin liners used by punks as accessories signified a relative material poverty which was either directly experienced and exaggerated or sympathetically assumed, and which in turn was made to stand for the spiritual paucity of everyday life.[145] Punks re-enacted their impoverished state through dress and their rage through their behaviour. Even if the poverty was being parodied, the wit was indisputably pointed. Beneath the out-fitting there lurked the unaccepted and disfigured face of capitalism; a divided and unequal society was being unstitched. Westwood and McLaren had made a place between dressing poor as a trend, a fad without politics, and the dominant system of neat dress with yet another kind of uniform. Indeed McLaren later claimed to have been making clothes "for an army of disenfranchised youth".[146]

Through Punk, Westwood and McLaren sought to create a form of dress that mirrored what they saw as the social decay around them. It was an anthem, as they regarded it, for those fed up with the British Government's brutal assault on working class youths. As McLaren writes in 1974:

> I start again by tearing my clothes apart. By jumping on them, making them dirty. By bathing them in gray dye. I make ugliness beautiful. I form a gang with Vivienne, and on the King's Road in Chelsea, we inadvertently invent a style that denies commercial application. It proudly displays a "not for sale" feeling. I dig in the ruins of a past culture. It becomes my art. It's not nostalgia – that's simply dead tissue. It's a wickedly old-fashioned, sexy chaos that empowers me and impacts on others.[147]

Like a relic from this cold political scuffle, the Let it Rock top with its stains, black inky dirtiness and the brownness of old bruises looks as if it putrefying or

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[144] Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 18.
[145] Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 18.
[146] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/13/style/tmagazine/TM1502150.html Accessed 15.3.05
[147] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/13/style/tmagazine/TM1502150.html Accessed 15.3.05

diseased. It mimics this social decay and uses the disenfranisement of a generation as the inspiration for making "ugliness beautiful", as McLaren describes it.

Punk adds another dimension to our understanding of intentionally wearing holes, stains and tears. The Let it Rock top, when worn by alienated British youths, exaggerated the theatrical aspects of poverty where all the embedded references suggest a nihilism born of economic frustration.[148] Thus Veblen's key signifiers of inelegance such as dirt and stains are (seemingly) faked in a knowing caricature by the British designers, leaving the garment clear in its appetite for destruction as it seeks to break with convention.

This decay and disease – stains, holes, rips – embedded in the Let it Rock top are the antithesis of beauty's robustness. Thus it is also the antithesis of fashion's typical drive to reflect society's demands for cleanliness and newness as signs of order. The holes in the Let it Rock top might easily have been created by an insect or rodent or a virus infecting the garment that eats the material away like a rot. Sealed down with stitching, the sutured holes resemble a gammy wound that constantly weeps. Equally, the holes may have been caused by some kind of abuse, making it a potentially traumatic characteristic of the garment. Here Westwood and McLaren revel in the threat of the formless, because all material, unless curtailed by form as we learnt from Julia Kristeva, threatens to become abject: oozing, leaking, seething, expanding, peeling, flaking, emerging and metamorphosing unexpectedly. The pair push our noses in the base materialism that we are corporeally entangled with and prefer to disavow.

Westwood notes that up until the mid 1970s she never thought of herself as a designer, rather, that she was "helping Malcolm out on this projects".[149] At this time, neither had ever produced a collection and a strict fashion industry term seems irrelevant to such a project (including the store, clothes and music) defined by experimental one-off pieces, a philosophy of re-crafting and the (mis-)transformation of existing garments intertwined with punk and its do-it-

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[148] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 7.
[149] Wilcox *Vivienne Westwood* 15.

yourself ideology. In addition, as the sewn-in tag in this top reads, the garment has been "styled", that is, it had been "fashioned" or "arranged" rather than cut from a piece of cloth in a purposeful way. Indeed, it might be more apt to think of the top as having been abducted by Westwood and McLaren and battered into a shape fit for sale, as if "styled" was a coded euphemism for deliberate maltreatment.

In appearance the Let it Rock top is out of control and commits a crime, even though, as Hebdige describes punk accessorising, these "crimes" are only broken codes.[150] That is, holes and other openings made by the zips break dominant social codes about neat and tidy dress and potential exposure while the layers of scribble, smudges and threads are a perverse choice of additions to the surface of the garment. Following the logic of architect and writer Adolf Loos, the top commits additional crimes, that of being "over-worked" with photographic patches, useless zips, unnecessary additional threads, deliberately-made holes, potato-stamp splotches and for being "tattooed" with graffiti. Loos' "passion for smooth and precious surfaces" informed his philosophy that ornamentation has a negative impact on objects, causing them to go out of style and thus become obsolete.[151] For Loos, it is a crime to add decoration in part because overt embellishment too firmly tethers an object to a particular moment in time.

The Let it Rock top is adorned with "tattoos" in the form of permanent inky marks. Again, according to Loos's reckoning, this is a sign that the wearer, by implication, is destined to break the law. In his now famous essay *Ornament and Crime* (1908) Loos introduces the concept of "immorality" to ornament, often describing it as "degenerate" and even warned that its suppression was necessary for regulating modern society.[152] One of Loos' prime examples was the tattooing of the Papuan and the intense surface decorations of the objects with which the Papuans surround themselves. Loos considered New Guinean culture not to have evolved to the same moral and civil levels of modern

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[150] Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 2.
[151] Studio International, 1973, Volume 186, Number 957, "Adolf Loos: the new vision". See: http://www.studio-international.co.uk/archive2/loos_1973_186_957d.asp. Accessed 29.3.09.
[152] Bernie Miller and Melony Ward (eds) *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos* (Toronto: XYZ Books 2002) 29.

European man at the beginning of the twentieth century; a man who should he tattoo himself, would be considered either a criminal or a degenerate.[153] Loos goes as far to suggest that if a tattooed man dies free, it is because he has died prematurely, before committing his crime.[154] Only a few years earlier and in a similar vein, Nietzsche recounts anthropological criminologists who claimed that the typical criminal is ugly: *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*: monstrous in appearance, monstrous in spirit.[155] Each writer suggests that degeneracy and criminality are closely connected to appearances. This link implies that these appearances communicate in socially charged ways and that ugliness is a powerful, even divisive, communicator that, as Westwood and McLaren show, can be harnessed by the fashion designer.

Around seventy years later Hebdige attributes, the degeneracy that Loos described and abhorred, to punks who embodied their philosophy in the clothes they wore and who sought a politicised, deliberately perverse and ultimately empowering reclamation of the idea of degeneracy. Hebdige writes:

> The punks were not only directly responding to increasing joblessness, changing moral standards, the rediscovery of poverty, the Depression, etc., they were dramatising what had come to be called 'Britain's decline'. It was fitting that the punks should present themselves as 'degenerates'; as signs of the highly publicised decay which perfectly represented the atrophied condition of Great Britain.[156]

This time, rather than sitting on the surface of the skin as does a tattoo – the interruption to the smooth surface that angered Loos – punk was even more pronounced and more interested in the effects of ornament. Punks pierced right through the surface of the skin with safety pins where is it most visible and affecting: ears, nose, lips and eyebrows to enact a sign of generational breakdown and social chaos. In light of Loos's views, to wear Westwood and McLaren's Let it Rock top is play at being immoral: a state aimed for directly by the designers who had the destruction of bourgeois good taste in their sights

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153 Miller and Ward (eds) *Crime and Ornament* 29.
154 Miller and Ward (eds) *Crime and Ornament* 29.
155 Michael Tanner (ed*) The Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ: or How to Philosophize with a Hammer by Friedrich Nietzche* (London: Penguin 1990) 40.
156 Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 89.

through the rise of a politicised youth culture. Thus, the top is outside fashion, to desire it quells up perversity: it is wantonly unwearable. That it is wearable is the top's core provocation. It sends up fashion.

Like tattoos, Westwood and McLaren also used graffiti as both a way to channel the voice of youth and a way of talking to them; being the medium and the message.[157] Designer graffiti is highly controlled and edited to fit a garment, it is a directed sign but also allows the designer to appear free of their own creation due to graffiti's carefully managed lack of authorship, except amongst those with the specialist ability to read its meanings.[158]

Subcultural style is pregnant with significance and it is within these groups that we find more associations between dress and ugliness and issues of class. Subcultures manifest when systems of communication, forms of expression and representation become catagorized into clans or tribes.[159] As Hebdige notes, "punks were dying to recreate themselves in caricature, to 'dress up' their destiny in its true colours, to substitute the diet for hunger, to slide the ragamuffin look ('unkempt' but meticulously coutured) between poverty and elegance".[160] Thus, to dress as a degenerate and to claim ugliness for a purpose not only reiterates distrust and distaste with the status quo but claims real value for and authenticity within that position. Art historian Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe explains, "Beauty, in being frivolous, and in that trivial and irrelevant, is always subversive because it's always a distraction from the worthwhile, which lets us know it's worthwhile by not being beautiful."[161] Nietzsche too claims that which

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[157] Even today, graffiti remains a taboo via which designers tap into youth culture. As curator and academic Chris Townsend notes: The carefully styled, unauthorized mark became a motif to which fashion designers could repeatedly return as a guarantee of authenticity and individuality through its subversion of the sameness of the manufactured item. See Chris Townsend R*apture: Art's Seduction by Fashion Since 1970* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) 49.
[158] For example, In photographer Masoud's shoot for *Harper's & Queen* in 2001 two models are photographed in a graffiti-scrawled space. They are surrounded by fridges and freezers as if abandoned by the roadside on a "hard rubbish" night and scribbled with Jean-Michel Basquiet-inspired nonsense writings, some motivated directly by the artist's paintings. The shoot was called urban scrawl. The combination of graffiti and glamour is the same juxtaposition of supposed opposites that enchanted the admirers of Basquiat's self-styled/ street-styled conscious 'primitivism'. The designer's defacement, rather than devaluing the garment further enhances their status through personalization – albeit the designer's rather than the individual owners in a carefully constructed tautology. See: Chris Townsend *Rapture* 50
[159] Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 18.
[160] Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 66.
[161] Gilbert Rolfe *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* 69.

is beautiful, also makes us skeptical.[162] We are physiologically weakened by ugliness, he argues, as it reminds us of our own inevitable decay and of danger and impotence; it actually deprives us of strength. One can measure the effect of the ugly with a dynamometer, claims Nietzsche: wherever man is depressed at all, he senses the proximity of something "ugly." Designers such as Westwood and McLaren who explore ugliness therefore take on this fear. Attuned to the critical power of this position, as Gilbert-Rolfe outlines, their embrace of dereliction is promoted as a form of both sartorial and social courage. Arguably, it is this claiming of ugliness which promotes Westwood and McLaren into a position of fashion leadership.

It is widely deemed that clothes with holes should be mended or thrown away. However, purpose-made holes are a key characteristic of "dressing poor". Deliberate holes are illogical, wasteful, ad-hoc, anarchic and violent, they break social codes and are therefore a kind of social crime. In the example of the Let it Rock top, holes hold oppositional meanings and when employed by Westwood and McLaren they express anger, power and revolt. The very cut-up quality of the top adds to this aggression. Equally, the top is a traumatic garment in its use of amputated features like a missing left sleeve. Here, holes, stains, tears and absent parts have their social value reconfigured by the designer but their status is deliberately obscure, even perverse.

The Let it Rock top helps us to see how a "holes" in a garment can change identity, from something regarded as a sign of wear and tear to an element of deliberate intervention, even as a sign of fashion's presence. Tears are more often signs of accidents, but these holes were not created over long periods of labour or years of uninterrupted wear. Instead, they were made as the garment was conceived. In addition, the holes in the Let it Rock top are sewn down in the wrong direction deliberately freezing them and leaving permanent gaps that would reveal a shoulder or stomach flesh or a bra strap. What the hole reveals is therefore also incorporated by it.[163]

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[162] http://www.handprint.com/SC/NIE/GotDamer.html Accessed 3.11.09
[163] Echoing the violence embedded in the Let it Rock top, Martin Margiela's series of garments with bullet holes, slashes and rips are what *Purple* magazine's Oliver Zahm call's – "tear[s] without chronology" meaning they are gaping holes without a history, they are designer-made.

The Let it Rock top is trashy, both in the sense that the lewd photographic patches are cheap and nasty and anti-social, as well as the fact that the top appears unmistakably like a piece of screwed up, used rag. Looking closely at the top, Westwood and McLaren seem to suggest that the commodity and trash are as closely linked as production and consumption. Indeed, it may even be that we can think of commodities such as the top as deferred rubbish.[164] While the Let it Rock top looks like a throw-away rag, some designers have used the appearance of trash, even in haute couture.

Ironically, punk had its own dress code and to that end, it could be easily parodied and, as a result, commodified. Punk clothing and insignia could be bought mail-order by 1977, and in September of that year *Cosmopolitan* ran a review of Zandra Rhodes' latest collection of "couture follies" which consisted entirely of variations on the punk theme. The accompanying article ended with an aphorism – to shock is chic – which foreshadowed the subculture's imminent demise. What was once authentic ugliness became dressing poor as depoliticised style.
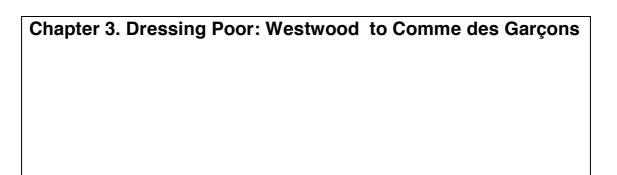
The apparent ugliness explored in the thesis extends from a concept borrowed from ancient Greece which has been retained up to today, whereby beauty is accompanied by youth and ugliness by old age. The binary opposed pairs dictate that the worn out or seemingly dilapidated – the poverty aesthetic – is thus central to fashion's relationship to ugliness. As a result, mixed messages within the fashion system, even within a single garment, happily co-exist. As it did in ancient Greek times, stoicism does not recommend poverty, it recommends that we neither fear or despise it. It considers wealth to be a *productum*, a preferred thing – neither an essential one, nor a crime. As Alain de Botton describes the Stoics "Their houses can be as grand, as their furniture is beautiful. They are identified wise by only one detail: how they would respond to sudden poverty. They would walk away from the house and the servants without rage or

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No long term wear or tear is at work here, rather the garment relies on creation out of loss. See Oliver Zahm 'Before and After Fashion: A Project for *Artforum* by Martin Margiela', *Artforum*, March 1995: 119.
[164] Stallabrass *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* 173.

despair".[165] We dabble with a related attitude when we choose to dress poor and reveal our comfort with the appearance of poverty in wearing the discarded and deconstructed. This is a lesson that can also be related to the thesis project, if we read ugliness as a concept, design strategy and reoccurring historical motif within fashion which, far from signifying a wearer's impoverished state, instead marks their heightened cultural capital and ability to circumvent the stigma of poverty, even as they mimic its codes.

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[165] Botton *The Consolations of Philosophy* 98.

Chapter 3. Dressing Poor: Westwood to Comme des Garçons

While the Let it Rock top is a kind of costume for members of a subculture, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren continued to create garments exploring ugliness and the theme of dressing poor into the early 1980s and some of these garments hang in the imaginary wardrobe. As the pair gained notoriety and critical acclaim, their work took them to the catwalks of Paris and closer to a mainstream, albeit avant-garde fashion literate, audience.

Some of the earliest pieces hanging in the wardrobe date from 1982 when Westwood and McLaren created their Nostalgia of Mud (also called Buffalo) collection and reignited the trend for dressing poor amongst a more general consumer. They created bashed-in, over-sized hats; knotted leather bags that resemble a hobo's pack carried on a stick; prints that mimic muddy stains; fake fur collars and cuffs that brush in multi directions, impersonating dirt; uneven, patchwork-style construction; creased cottons; layers of skirts in dirty chocolate browns, grey marl and taupe that might suggest the owner, like an itinerant homeless person, was wearing all their possessions at once; high heels turned into baggy, shapeless foot covers tied up with dirty-looking ribbons and fabrics more common to men's underwear. Even the title of the collection – Nostalgia of Mud – seems a perversely wistful, anti-fashion longing for filth. Appropriately, the shop selling the collection of the same name, featured bubbling pools of mud rising out of the floor that had to be negotiated by customers. The collection continued their inverted Robin Hood philosophy; to make the rich look poor so that the poor would look rich.[166]

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[166] Robyn Healy *Couture to Chaos: Fashion from the 1960s to now from the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1996) 55.

The year that Westwood and McLaren presented their Nostalgia of Mud collection in London, protesters from a local church group and soup kitchen gathered outside New York's Bloomingdales department store. The in-store boutique's display of mostly new designs from London, including Westwood and McLaren's garments, were described by *The New York Times* as "unhemmed, raggy, inside-out … post-punk tatters".[167] According to fashion theorist Rebecca Arnold, "the protesters objected to what they saw as a condescending aping of poverty by expensive and elitist fashion designers, inappropriate to the more financially buoyant situation in America".[168] It was felt that the styles were manifestations of the bourgeois supplier's callousness and insensitivity to the plight of the hungry and homeless. But most repugnant of all was the thought of the financial exploitation of such a real and serious problem. The store's buyers and management, it appears, had seen the style simply as form deprived of content, and had not examined the socially charged commentary and intent of the designers. It proved to be an unfortunate oversight, for the poor look is a style volatile with meaning.[169]

While Westwood and McLaren produced Nostalgia for Mud, Japanese designers Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo also presented collections in Paris that caused a sensation. Both Yamamoto and Kawakubo placed great significance on clothing inherited from the past and worked within a system created to overthrow the existing regulations and norms of clothing and fashion.[170] Kawakubo, in particular, referenced ragged, tattered, poor, ill-fitting, second-hand clothes. The collection expressed creativity through destruction – what fashion and textiles curator Harold Koda in an important article first describing an "aesthetics of poverty" called "conscious destitution".[171] Newspaper headlines, following the first showing of the designs screamed "Japan Shock" and "Fashion's Pearl Harbour". Kawakubo was called a "Rag-Picker" who promoted

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[167] Laurie Johnston and Sheila Rule 'Rags of the Rich, Rags of the Poor' *The New York Times* May 27 1983: B2.
[168] Rebecca Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 2001) 25.
[169] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 7.
[170] Yuniya Kawamura 'The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion' *Fashion Theory* Volume 8 Issue 2: 197.
[171] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 7.

a "Hiroshima bag lady look".[172] Fashion journalist Sally Brampton reiterated the dominant interpretations of Kawakubo's models:

> Their make-up alienating: only a livid blue bruise marked out a mouth or an eye socket, burnt orange and chrome was blistered across cheekbones and eyebrows, and their hair was as kempt as a scarecrow's thatch. Their clothes, too, seemed in tatters – great flapping coats with frayed edges, covered black and grey cocoons of fabric, which were looped and wrapped around their emaciated bodies.[173]

That Kawakubo's models also took on the effects of dressing poor in their hair and makeup, even in their posture, suggests a desire to rethink fashion as an extension of the consumer personally. In an oblique nod to her use of creative and accelerated destruction and a desire to understand fashion's obsessive concentration on beauty, Kawakubo notes, "Only that which was never there is worth showing".[174] In the hands of a professional designer, nothing is accidental or uncalculated. These garments are the end product of conceptual, as a much as a manual exercise. Kawakubo implies that dressing poor it is not only a look, but a way a dressing that would have implications for wearer physically and philosophically.

To create the looks in her collection, Kawakubo left pieces of linen out in the sun to dry in a crumpled heap over several days, submitting the fabric to the ravages of the elements. To make flaws she loosened a screw here or there on her looms and created hand-knitted black sweaters with lacy fissures like moth holes. As the designer recalls:

> The machines that make fabric are more and more making uniform, flawless textures. I like it when something is off – not perfect. Hand weaving is the best way to achieve this. Since this isn't always possible, we loosen a screw of the machines here and there so they can't do exactly what they're supposed to do.[175]

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[172] Bonnie English *Griffith University's Tokyo Vogue: Japanese/Australian Fashion* (Brisbane: Griffith University/Queensland College of Art 1999) 35.
[173] Sally Brampton *Observer* 25 September 1983: 29.
[174] Thomas Grünfeld *Déformation Professionnelle: Gummis, misfits & Kleider von Comme de Garçons* (Bonn: Cantz 1999) Unpaginated.
[175] Leonard Koren *New Fashion Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International 1984) 117.

According to Koda, the "original meaning" of the poor looks in Kawakubo's collection can be found almost a decade before in Westwood and McLaren's fabrication of punk during the 1970s, a stylistic language still visible in their work of the early 1980s. Indeed Westwood states, "I am flattered when people tell me that the Japanese are inspired by my ripped, oversize, 'poor look'".[176] In its place, however, Koda suggests that Kawakubo's exploration of the flawed and despoiled is supplanted with a transgressive, more complex and distinctly "Japanese" meaning. It was a version, Koda argued, of traditional Japanese aesthetic philosophy, expounded in the traits of *wabi* and *sabi* which attribute a superior moral value to the "flawed" artefact and "poor" materials.[177] Pared down to its barest essence, *wabi sabi* is the art of finding beauty in imperfection and profundity in nature, of accepting the natural cycle of growth, decay, and death. It is simple, slow, and uncluttered-and it reveres authenticity above all. This "Japanese'" meaning has come to connote Kawakubo's exploration of the beauty of "conscious destitution."[178] Arguably then, Kawakubo over-writes punk with something else that blends her own personal history, the street fashions peculiar to Japan and that country's particular cultural concepts such as *wabi sabi*.[179] Her "strategy", genuine or not, of loosening the screws in the machines that make her clothes – so as to intentionally create flaws – is understood by Koda as not so much a social intervention but a technological and aesthetic one in the face of Westwood and McLaren's more "lo-fi" approach.[180]

In light of this personal-as-political style, Koda defines Kawakubo's monochrome, torn, baggy and layered look as an "elaboration" on the English sartorial phenomenon as her "poor look" is borne from an affluent Japanese economy. As a result, says Koda, the original English meaning of the poverty aesthetic is lost and reduced to a "quotation of forms".[181] He reads Kawakubo's clothes as aesthetically and technologically-driven and devoid of socio-political

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[176] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 7.
[177] Koren *New Fashion Japan* 117.
[178] The Kyoto Costume Institute Fashion *The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute A History from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Köln: Taschen 2002) 635.
[179] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 7.
[180] Historian and curator Valerie Steele calls it an 'important development in late twentieth-century design'. See Valerie Steele *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1997) 128.
[181] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 8.

considerations. Arguably, however, Kawakubo's philosophy is not so far removed from McLaren's ironic, inverted "Robin Hood" concept for fashion when she describes the New York bag lady as a kind of muse, her "ideal woman to dress". [182] Who better represents the loneliness, poverty and self-sufficiency so prized in *wabi sabi*, and with more dramatic clarity? It suggests a desire on the part of the Japanese designer, as it had for Westwood and McLaren when making punk clothes, to form a kind of rapport between the poor of the poor look and the real human existence of life on the street. While Kawabubo's desire for and interest in things that are "off" and "not perfect"[183] is different to McLaren's idea of "using culture as a way of making trouble," [184] American readers of contemporary fashion magazines and members of the press were nonetheless affronted by what the designs meant, as if they reduced the poignancy and degradations associated with class struggle and poverty.

Looking at the cover of the journal *Dress* from 1985, we see a close-up image of Kawakubo's leather booties. Originally published in the July 1983 issue of American *Vogue*, these shoes became a talisman for discussion around the poor look. For example, in the same issue that readers wrote in to complain about *Vogue*'s coverage of Kawakubo's designs, a staff journalist described this footwear in bemused, though animated terms, as representing "a new source of inspiration for shoes … it could be from men or workmen, or, here, from peasants".[185] Kawakubo's interest in deliberately aging and injecting flaws into her garments and accessories recalls the work of Vincent van Gogh and one of his most debated works, *Shoes*, 1886.

In his book on Van Gogh's *Shoes*, Geoffrey Batchen describes how the painter bought the shoes, freshly polished, at a flea market but because they were "lacking in fantasy" he wore them during a long walk in the rain so that once covered in mud "they appeared more interesting".[186] As Batchen suggests of Van Gogh: "to wear a peddler's shoes, and then to paint them, is to identify with

[182] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 8.
[183] Koren. *New Fashion Japan* 34.
[184] http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1231_vivienne_westwood Accessed 13.05.05.
[185] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetics of Poverty' 6.
[186] Geoffrey Batchen *What of Shoes: Van Gogh and Art History* (Berlin: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Coroud, Geoffrey Batchen and E.A. Seemann Verlag, 2009) 13.

(even to temporarily become) a person of that lower social class".[187] Arguably Kawakubo, Yamamoto and Westwood and McLaren seek to achieve a similar effect: they make public something other than the "thingness" of the fashion object, these clothes cannot help but recall the fragile membrane between the haves and have-nots that delineate class structures and indeed, the notion of fashion as a mirror of reality. These clothes are as much about fashion as they are about dressing poor. Such a trend is thus capable of destabilising all purported binaries in fashion as well as our core pairing of beauty and ugliness.

The 1990s: Recession Dressing, Slumming, Grunge

Towards the end of the twentieth century, trying on poor looks or "slumming" as it became known, took on some of the meaning that Foucault describes in the Stoic's experimentation with "fancied poverty" where consumers "experimented" with misfortune by dressing poor. During the global recession of the late 1980s through to the 1990s, millions experienced sustained economic decline, diminished standards of living and substantive white-collar unemployment. The circumstances that marked the world economy at this time had remarkable consequences for the fashion industry which launched "recession dressing", marking the 1990s as the decade of a kind of anti-fashion. As American designer Marc Jacobs, who was notoriously dismissed from employer Perri Ellis on account of his 1993 grunge-inspired collection, notes, "I was genuinely so inspired by … this idea of beauty in imperfection. It was about a sensibility and also about a dismissal of everything that one was told was beautiful, correct, glamorous, sexy".[188]

Suddenly dressing poor was the desired look and even those who could still afford the best were morally imposed on to choose the spoiled as MOMA's then fashion curator Richard Martin described in 1992, recalling Foucault on the Stoics:

> We feel the fragility of economic status and tend to avoid its flamboyance. It has made people aware of their tenuous hold on position, status and power in society and has accentuated the fact that tomorrow,

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[187] Batchen *What of Shoes: Van Gogh and Art History* 13-14.
[188] http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/columns/belinda-white Accessed 3.6.2011

anyone could be a candidate for misfortune. In these stringent economic circumstances, it seems that we look at the poor and symbols of poverty differently. If we could have imagined that we were at a cool philosophical distance from poverty or in a position to make a political statement by wearing oversized, tangled, and monochromatic clothing a decade ago, that position has been pre-empted by popular fashion.[189]

It is just at this moment where Martin notes a change in the perception of the codes and symbols of poverty – the appearance of "oversized, tangled, and monochromatic clothing" – that we see the redrawing of poor looks within fashion's broader vocabulary. Not only were the traditional codes for the look of poverty incorporated by fashion but the typical symbols of wealth were downplayed, as Chanel had advised her clients. In an example from the period, reflective of a growing penchant for misusing the traditional insignias of affluence, Karl Largerfeld radically abused the very materials at the heart of his employer – the Italian fashion house Fendi. He crushed Persian lamb to look like flannel, shaved mink, mixed fake with real fur, and made simple sweaters out of sable, an expensive and classic fur coat material.[190] As Koda and Martin note, "One realizes the shimmering beauty of a Fendi fur coat that is seemingly destroyed to become evocatively and aesthetically richer than conventional furs".[191] A group of designers from Antwerp, including Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten and Martin Margiela, became famous for a similar approach, invoking Beaton's description of Chanel's "nihilistic, anti-fashion look" fifty years earlier.[192]

Since the late 1980s Belgian-born, Paris-based designer Martin Margiela has cut up and reassembled second-hand clothing and trash to create new, designer gear. For example, men's army surplus socks have been remade as jumpers, jackets out of duct tape, plastic carrier bags or laundry bags become T-shirts and waistcoats are produced out of broken crockery.[193] Margiela's "raw materials" were detritus when he started with them – the commodity form with

[189] Martin 'Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s' 4.
[190] G. Y. Dyansky 'Largerfeld, Baroque to his Bones'. *Connoisseur*, December, 1985.
[191] Martin and Koda *Infra-apparel* 94.
[192] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 41.
[193] While some of these examples are not intended to have commercial appeal, the army-surplus sock jumper has been publicly available by Margiela to anyone interested in following his published instructions.

the lowest exchange value in the fashion system.[194] Eco discusses of the use of trash in creative practice:

> having come to the end of their cycle as consumer goods, now supremely useless, these objects are in some ironical way redeemed of their uselessness, of their "poverty", even of their wretchedness, to reveal an unsuspected Beauty.[195]

As Eco notes, and as we have learned from Marcus Aurelius, ugliness can be redeemed by context and restored of its uselessness. That is, by reviewing our opinion of trash, the discarded, the unwanted, the lower than low, we may find beauty. Importantly, for Eco, it is the creative practitioner – in our case the fashion designer – who is able to disclose what is special or interesting about the unwanted and its "wretchedness". In part, the "aura" around the successful fashion designer themselves lends the once ugly its seemingly "magical" powers of transformation as consumers purchase brand names over a garment's form, colour or utility. As Walter Benjamin suggested, consumption creates fantasy worlds that offer to the modern individual a variety of identities, vicarious experiences and emotions.[196] Margiela's re-use of detritus, for example, bestows on customers the cachet recognised only by an elite clientele as he resuscitates second-hand clothing with its low status into the high status of the unique fashion piece.[197]

However, as Joanne Finkelstein notes, again in an echo of Marx's critique of commodity fetishism, "fashion hides the origins of things".[198] The "Margiela touch" then, converts urban refuse into something of value but without denying its "wretchedness". Similarly, Eco has written of many mid twentieth-century artists re-assessing materials subject to wear and tear, transformation and decay, that change occurs through the "selecting, highlighting and conferring form upon the formless and setting the seal of style upon it."[199] Consumers of designer fashion are encouraged to accept these materials as Margiela reveals

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[194] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 249.
[195] Eco *The History of Beauty* 409.
[196] See Walter Benjamin *Illuminations* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973).
[197] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 249.
[198] Finkelstein *Slaves of Chic* 116.
[199] Eco *The History of Beauty* 405.

them, and to apprehend their newly exposed beauty wrought by carefully applied techniques and concepts for their re-presentation.

"Each class and culture has established its own fine line between what is considered appropriate for re-commodification and what is not", writes Arjun Appadurai who has highlighted a distinction in what he refers to as "the dilemma of distinguishing wear from tear".[200] That is, while in many cases wear is a sign of the right sort of duration in the social life of things, but sheer disrepair or decrepitude is not. The challenge, as Appadurai sees it, is that dressing poor renders the distinction between wear and tear intentionally unclear and today that poses an indeterminate challenge to traditional dress codes that once easily also defined class. Thus simultaneously we have a fragmentation where there are increasingly fewer social taboos regarding dress that can't be made attractive by designer nous.

Martin Margiela and a group of Belgian designers known collectively as the Antwerp Six explored "the decay of fabric and flesh" and their ambivalence towards the fashion world became a particularly apt form of styling as the 1990s wore on into recession.[201] Their work recalled the Northern Renaissance artists, five hundred years before, who were also attuned to the visceral impact of decay where the living/dying flesh of a painting of Christ hinted at the miraculous resurrection. A crucified, putrefying God without comfort gave succour to those undergoing their own final struggle while bloodied, festering wounds aided the demonstration of the miracle. As if invoking those painters of another age, the Belgian fashion designers created long, layered, oversized, draped and monochromatic clothes, and in the case of Demeulemeester, long "strings" of fabric fell from the garments as if referencing a deflated puppet that had been cut loose or indeed, the lacklustre skin of Matthias Grünewald's most famous crucified Christ (1515); as had Westwood and McLaren in their 1977 tattered, muslin bondage top *Destroy*. Thus, as it had been in Chanel's day, a kind of faux

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[200] Appaduri in Alexandra Palmer & Hazel Clark (eds.) Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion (New York: Berg 2005) 3
[201] Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety* 25. The Antwerp Six refers to a group of influential avantgarde fashion designers graduating from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts between 1980-1981: Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee.

invisibility in dress, a lack of obvious ostentation and even a slouched deportment was the height of fashion.

These designers exemplify Richard Martin's suggestion that it is more honest to design fashion that reflects alienation, decay and abjection, rather than false optimism or flashy hedonism if that is the zeitgeist. Thus, when symbols of poverty are no longer restricted to the destitute but circulate amongst the middle and upper classes, they are also legitimated as part of the fashion designer's palette. Martin goes on:

> Among those consequences [of the recession] is fashion's desire to portray poverty. An imagery of poverty, a recognition of social ills, can yield a Grapes of Wrath as readily, if not more so, as it constricts the human spirit. Fashion designers … may not be exacting social justice, but they are realising the ceaseless role of imagination in and upon the economic order. Fashion can still make a prince or a princess into a pauper and vice versa. In that aptitude, there is unbounded richness and there is inventive hope for all.[202]

The net effect is that recession and widespread social dysfunction is a boon to the designer's powers of invention. According to Martin, when designers are forced to rethink fashion design and its consumption, the tools and the materials open to them must also be creatively rethought. Indeed, much of the emotional power of consumption resides in the fact that, although heartfelt, it is experienced in the imaginary mode. The consumer response to the economic situation by recession dressing cannot be triggered by the "actual" experience of poverty, rather it is an interaction with the signs and images of deprivation.[203]

This apparent resourcefulness recalls the material shortages experienced in Australia and the other countries involved in World War II. These shortages gave rise to creative reinvention and, significantly, a rethinking of the scope of glamour and beauty. *Sydney Morning Herald* fashion and society journalist, Constance "Connie" Robertson described this at the time:

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[202] Martin 'Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s' 7.
[203] Illiouz "Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A new research agenda" 397.

> The materials which have gone into the making of every article demanded by women for covering or adornment are needed to make guns and ammunition, ships and planes and bombs, and to clothe our fighting men; the workers in factories who made all these goods to satisfy feminine needs or whims have now a sterner task. It remains for women to adjust themselves to the changing fashion scene. They must do what they will with that outmoded word 'glamour' and cast around for another word which will suggest a quality infinitely more practical though none the less alluring.[204]

Thus "salvaging" became the prime preoccupation of serious civil servants during World War II and an economy of ideas was established for the exchange of inventive tips, craft skills and ingenuity to soften the blow of government regulations and the physical fact of material shortages: once government-issued coupons had run out it didn't matter how much money one had in their pockets.[205] But this call for creativity can be understood in more than one way. While it captures the Second World War's Make-do-and-Mend movement with its seemingly indefatigable resourcefulness – turning old curtains into suits and old suits into dresses – Martin's call for inventiveness might also be considered an invitation to mine a poverty aesthetic for new sources of inspiration, legitimacy and profits without a thought for those who dress poor out of necessity rather than choice.

The subtitle of Martin's essay, "The Riches of Poverty", reiterates the suggestion that there is money to be made in aping destitution. Indeed, it's a proposition that perversely highlights John Maynard Keynes' "paradox of thrift", which posits that if everyone saves, everyone gets poorer. It opens up the proposition that those who can profit from poverty, will (and for the benefit of the entire economy argues that it should) find a way to do so. Certainly, during the late 1980s/ early 1990s recession, the later reading of Martin's theory had widespread resonance. It highlighted the questionable motives of fashion designers charged with the creation of a look known as "slumming".

Slumming was a practice, fashionable among segments of the middle class in many Western countries, to patronise areas or establishments populated by, or

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[204] Alexandra Joel *Parade: The story of fashion in Australia* Harper Collins Publishers Pty Ltd Sydney, Revised edition 1998: 145.
[205] Joel *Parade: The story of fashion in Australia* 146.

intended for, people well below their own socio-economic level, motivated by curiosity or a desire for adventure.[206] For some consumers of the trend captured by a journalist for the *New York Times* this was radical chic[207] and one side of slumming's two distinct strains; on the one hand, slumming can be read as deliberately dour understatement in response to a bleak economic and political climate and a shedding of the accoutrements of wealth so as to connect with those less privileged. On the other hand, it is and simply another trend that requires the purchase of a raft of new, yet slightly different, clothes.[208] Arguably slumming is outfitting for a kind of class tourism motivated by curiosity, boredom, and even outright greed and miserliness. Whether moonlighting with trying on poor looks for politically-charged reasons, or not, during the last quarter of the twentieth century, wearing designer-made dirty, scruffy, too-big and torn garments signified the wearer's heightened cultural capital amongst those who share common codes and social positions.[209] These fine discriminations of distinction are crucial to understanding the current phases of the trend for dressing poor.

Slumming's best-known contemporary face is the most recognisable fashion movement of the 1990s – grunge. It was a look that emerged around 1992, the year Richard Martin wrote the essay "Destitution and Deconstruction" where he describes grunge as "working-class in origin and emulation".[210] The look, essentially a new form for seeking out the 'authentic' as a form of non-mass manufactured, non-commercial fashion was essentially an update to the hippy movement of the 1960. Grunge epitomises the relationship between fashion and ugliness and a peak in the trend for dressing poor. The look is characterised by exposed construction seams and layering, a return to thrift, androgyny and

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[206] Recreational slumming was popular in Victorian London, where omnibus rides through Whitechapel were in vogue. Similarly, slumming tours were documented through the Five Points slums in Manhattan during the 1840s.

[207] Michiko Kakutani 'Culture Zone: Slumming' *New York Times* May 26, 1996. Accessed 30.06.08.

[208] Givhan 'The Problem With Ugly Chic' 1997: 267.

[209] In an instance of proto-slumming more familiar to the nineteenth century rag balls, the success of Bertolt Brecht's 1928 pro-Marxist musical *The Threepenny Opera* made him an extraordinarily wealthy anti-capitalist. Ironically, however, he used his wealth to amass things that would make him appear poor. The most infamous example from his collection was a bespoke leather trench coat, constructed with great care, and great expense, to feature perfectly crooked seams and a perfectly bent collar. See Chris Ayres "Dump the politeness, let's get spending!" *The Age* 28.2.09: 9.

[210] Martin 'Destitution and Deconstruction: The Riches of Poverty in the Fashion of the 1990s' 6.

bricolage. The process of the design and construction is itself brought to the surface of the garment, instead of being concealed as part of the mystique of the design.[211] Importantly, however, grunge was ultimately a phenomenon amongst the mainstream while simultaneously personified by more self-styled celebrity figures. Grunge idols included high profile models such as Kate Moss who possessed a gaunt, unhealthy, so-called "heroin-chic" appearance and characterised by bands like Seattle-based Nirvana.

The music group's drug-dependent, depressed and, finally, fatally self-destructive, lead singer Kurt Cobain wore an on and off-stage uniform of worn-out trainers, tattered and patched jeans, over-sized knits with loose threads and holes and dirty, bleached long hair. Cobain's long-term connection with the look suggested that wearing grunge was to embrace dereliction as a way of life, and this commitment to the spoiled and ruined signalled his non-manufactured, "authentic" rock star status. That is, much like Lord Byron, King of the Romantic poets and often cited as the first modern-style celebrity, a certain aura of depression, self-destructive behaviour and illness guarantees popular fascination and genuine sub-cultural regard. However, it has been suggested that Cobain carefully crafted this impression by falsely claiming he had been homeless and forced to live under a bridge.[212]

As had punk, grunge reflected a general dissolution into feelings of hopelessness at the recession, a lack of optimism after a period of strident individualism and thus a decline in any sense of collectivism.[213] Part recession fashion, part obsessive recycling compulsion, grunge was, according to art-critic Jeff Gibson, "the (ideo)logical antidote to the crispy, clean cutesiness of the late-'80s yuppiedom".[214] Writing in the mid 1990s Gibson also finds the roots of grunge in punk:

> Trudging backwards through the illegitimate etymology of Grunge leads us through grime, sludge, fungus and scum to the rotting corpse of punk: grunge is what became of punk once the spotlight moved on ... Although

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[211] Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* 22.
[212] http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/ accessed 7 June 2011.
[213] Rebecca Arnold, 'Heroin Chic' *Fashion Theory* Volume 3 Issue 3, 1999: 286.
[214] Jeff Gibson 'Avant-Grunge' in Rex Butler *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 90s* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art 1996) 245.

> subcultural miscegenation is all the rage, Grunge is first and foremost a culture of second-degree white trash. [215]

For Gibson, grunge's historical link with punk, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, gives it a complex, political dimension when it shares punk's ability to break up the smooth surface of mainstream fashion, and instead provides a style for a discontented generation with an authentic pedigree. In this way, grunge is a style that seeks to highlight, rather than eliminate, fashion's inherent contradictions. It is a style that endorses imperfection, instead of the gloss of transcendent beauty familiar to fashion's fantastical, escapist instincts.

Further drawing out the politicised dimension of grunge, Gibson notes that the look is akin to an "inner-city Arte Povera".[216] Italian for Poor Art, Arte Povera and grunge share rags as a signature material from which to explore ideas of impermanence, simplicity, nonchalance, the unconventional and anti-consumerist behaviour.[217] Both consciously reject signs of affluence. In linking grunge to Arte Povera, the implication is that grunge takes fashion from being merely trend driven to socially and artistically relevant.

Moreover, for Gibson, the grunge trend is distinctively based in class status although ironic and illogical, when he claims that grunge is "second-degree white trash".[218] The term "second-degree" derives from a complex theory coined by Roland Barthes whereby nothing except the manner and power of quotation is new, where we are concerned with effect and seek out alternative combinations and recombinations of the old and the novel. It can be likened to J.G. Ballard's idea, originally aimed at a shopping centre, that only fakes are truly authentic.[219] Ballard describes a situation of mindless consumption in centres so large that they become grandiloquent satellite cities or zones without any reference point to "real" life. In defining shopping centres in this way he raises the idea that the ersatz and the simulated in fact hold a mirror to a society untethered to the past in a way that grants the quoted new life. The effect is that

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[215] Gibson 'Avant-Grunge' 245.
[216] Gibson 'Avant-Grunge' 247.
[217] See Marcia E Vetrocq 'Arte Povera: The Recount' *Art in America* March 2002: 89.
[218] Gibson 'Avant-Grunge' 245.
[219] See Sholto Byrnes *The Independent* 29 October 2002.

the quotation, fake or not, creates its own reality. Gibson argues that grunge follows this logic too, and that the look of ruination is quite often simply a novel affect. Grunge is not truly poor – it is eminently middle class –but in its desire for an authentic citation of poor looks it comes to represent a concept of genuineness for the whole subculture.

The notion of experiencing things second-hand, so as to experience them afresh, seems equally applicable to understanding an aesthetic based on a white, Western downward envy. In light of the recession of the early 1990s, there is the sense that trying on poor looks as slumming or as grunge is based on appearances fit for the times, either in empathy or simple flirtation. Rebecca Arnold described the first stages of this style when she suggests that fashion was attempting to respond to the spirit of the times: "A poor fit is essential because garments must look twice-used, as if rescued from some nameless disaster. In its own unique way, the rag trade has acknowledged the recession".[220]

This notion of reflecting social decay or sickness as a provisional aesthetic, has remained common to garments that are part of the trend for dressing poor. For example, in 1997 British designer Andrew Groves presented his debut collection in a bus depot as a fringe event to London Fashion Week.[221] The parade was aimed squarely at disrupting a society obsessed with beauty and was entitled "Status?". The show included torn string vests and dresses made from ripped plastic held together, punk-style, with metal pins while other garments were presented with unfinished hems threads left hanging, and jackets that had only one side completed or were finished off without a back panel.[222] As a finale, the last model walked to the middle of the catwalk and tore off a white paper jacket. She revealed a yellow plastic see-through mini-dress and unleashed a swarm of five hundred alive and dead flies.[223] The insects erupted over the top fashion journalists seated in the front row, causing horror and outrage.[224] In their release from the jacket, Groves insinuated that the flies were feasting on the model herself but as the flies moved to the journalists it also suggested that

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[220]Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety* 24.
[221] http://www.andrewgroves.com/staspress.html accessed 2.02.09
[222] http://www.andrewgroves.com/staspress.html accessed 2.02.09
[223] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 220.
[224] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 220.

they, the model and the garment were all infested with the same sickness: an obsession with uncovering beauty.

Also in 1997 Margiela produced the exhibition 9/4/1615 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. For his first solo exhibition he recreated in white one outfit from each of his previous eighteen collections. Since Margiela's first collection for Spring/Summer 1989 he, and his design team, have reworked pre-existing garments, fabrics and objects to recreate new clothes and accessories, while also recycling their own innovations by repeatedly re-presenting many of the very same items season and after season, an anathema to the fashion system.

In the exhibition 9/4/1615, Margiela's clothes were saturated with agar, a growing medium, and sprayed with green mould, pink yeast, or fuchsia or yellow bacteria. They were then left for four days while microorganisms grew on the clothes. Before the end of the week, the garments appeared aged as if they had been rediscovered after years in damp storage. The series of already "tattered" and shredded garments literally began to decay and age before museum goers. Arranged on the outside of the museum's glass exhibition space, the garments and their toxic, wet patinas were kept away from visitors who viewed the garments through the glass walls of the exhibition space, as if attending a hospital viewing room to see an infectious friend. The physicality of the installation set up an actual divide between viewer and garment in order to create a pause, a moment to question the fact that these clothes were out of reach and exposed to the elements. It heightened the sense that viewers had to be protected from some threat that lay within Margiela's work. Here, as Caroline Evans notes, the designer transforms "negative" ideas into "critical and questioning designs" by physically arranging the garments and exhibition viewers at a distance from one other for apparent reasons of safety.[225]

In an email interview between Margiela and McLaren in 2005 it is McLaren who make the connection between his designs and those of the Belgian designer. Their exchange highlights an evolution of the kind of DIY philosophy

[225] Evans 'The Golden Dustman" 73.

essential to Westwood and McLaren's fashion-making which takes on a symbolic, but still powerful new form, in Margiela's work. McLaren writes "... somehow I feel we are connected. I like the boiled, mucky sweaters ... I like your dirt and grunge. I like the fact that it looks like lots of people have stuck their dirty fingers on your clothes and left their marks all over them. [Compared with my designs] your clothes are just a little more grown up, that's all".[226] Margiela's work is a kind of excavation of a garment's secret history as he makes pieces out of recut underclothes, or produces dresses out of the linings of very elegant garments, a style ideal turned inside out.[227]

The apparent ugliness signaled by garments appearing dirty and diseased, and therefore menacing, is yet another chapter in the trend for dressing poor. Much like the Let it Rock top, this facet of the imaginary wardrobe is articulated in Comme des Garçons's Spring/Summer 1997 collection entitled *Dress Becomes Body Becomes Dress*, more commonly referred to by fashion curators and journalists as the "Bump" or "Lump" collection. The collection is especially significant to any investigation of fashion's relationship to beauty and ugliness because of its relationship with distortion. While not specifically invoking poverty, it signals a desire on the part of Kawakubo to explore a strain of looks associated with disease, decay, aging and non-standard proportion. As its own system of dress, the Bump collection bridges a connection between physical health and social or moral health and ugliness and what fashion's role might be in signalling the wearer's position within this nexus. Remember that the context for this collection is one where the status quo dictates that which is harmonious to be beautiful and that which is distorted to be ugly.[228] It is a context already outlined by the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who writes that beauty is the result of due proportion and integrity, and that:

> an object or human body must have all the characteristics that its form has imposed upon the material, ugliness is applied to things that are out

[226] Malcolm McLaren and Martin Margiela, 'Has Anybody Here Seen My Old Friend Martin?' *The New York Times*, March 13, 2005.
[227] Oliver Zahm 'Before and After Fashion: A Project for *Artforum* by Martin Margiela', *Artforum*, March 1995: 119.
[228] Eco *On Ugliness* 10.

of proportion: things that are diminished in form or lacking integrity by excess.[229]

The Bump collection – because it represents a moment of disorder from typical body shapes in its excessiveness – signals a loss of control and thus potential chaos. Indeed, like Thomas Aquinas, Eco reiterates the notion that ugliness is in part defined by "a lack of equilibrium".[230]

In some of the garments from the Bump collection the padding is so thick and cumbersome that the buttons appear as if they might pop open, suggesting that the garment is alive and continuing to swell and blister as if riddled with an engorging virus. In other examples, the fabric pulls under the arms and across the belly of the models suggesting that the bumps emanate from the wearer, rather than their clothing, as in Groves' fly-ridden dress. Some garments enclose the whole torso of the wearer in pod-shaped forms with only a small amount of room for a face to peak out. During the original parade, which ran in silence, the models walked so slowly that it seemed as if they were nomadically wandering, wrapped up in blankets in imitation of the itinerant who roam with all their possessions in tow and with nowhere to settle.

In other garments from the Bump collection, seemingly unfathomable growths appear from under skirts and hang like a third leg or third hip joint while transparent fabrics reveal the inserted pad directly. The pads were designed to be removable – a kind of "popping" of the bulging blisters – so while they can be completely separate to the garment framework when inserted, they are also seemingly still independent of it. Thus, even when the pads are added they can go *out of place*. They give the appearance of an x-ray view of a disease charging through the veins of their host: indeed the shop assistants at Comme des Garçons retail outlets in New York reputedly called them "tumour pieces".[231]

As we have already explored, Kristeva argues that the abject is not an object but a cultural safeguard, and in this case the abject is the sight of a texture, the embedded characteristic on the surface of a textile added there by the body

[229] Eco *On Ugliness* 15.
[230] Eco *On Ugliness* 19.
[231] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 269.

through wear.[232] It is not that dirt and stains or even a general lack of cleanliness or ill health that causes abjection, rather the fact that these elements disturb a strict social and sartorial identity system and an order of the kind outlined by Simmel and Veblen which is still considered significant today. The distortions to the typical human form proposed by the Bump collection highlight these systems of order and, in turn, the collection's non-standard proportions that thus deemed to be ugly . In contrast to the norm, such so-called disturbing characteristics of clothing do not respect the borders, positions or rules of socially-acceptable dress and, as Veblen reminds us, instead instil a kind of phobia when encountered by others.[233]

Avant-garde choreographer Merce Cunningham, who used the Bump collection in his dance performance *Scenario* (1997), dismissed the negative associations of the garment garments and instead suggested that they simply referenced "everyday" organic shapes – "a woman in shorts with a baby on her side [or] a man in a raincoat and a backpack ... shapes we see everyday".[234]

The dance born of the collaboration between Cunningham and Kawakubo premiered in October 1997 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where the dancers' movements took place against a stark all-white stage, lit with fluorescent lighting to the contemplative repetitive music of Takehisa Kosugi and Thurston Moore. *Scenari*o was roughly made of three movements punctuated by the change of the pattern and colour of the outer garments from gingham and striped blue and green, to all black and finally all red—while the padding understructure remained the same throughout. Kawakubo's garments were activated by the dancers' bodies in motion and their strangeness heightened by the unexpected bodily formations they made. It reinforced Cunningham's exploration of the limits and scope of bodily movements, as well as enhancing the bulges and distortions of Kawakubo's collection of unorthodox body shapes. A reviewer for *Interview* wrote:

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[232] Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 2.
[233] Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 6.
[234] Harold Koda *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed* (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 2001): 113.

Not only has their boundary-breaking work changed the vocabulary in the territory in which each of them has made his or her mark, but it has prompted new ways of understanding the body and beauty.[235]

Indeed, curator Richard Martin called the collection "perturbed beauty", while Harold Koda wrote that the Bump collection:

questions the notion of symmetry as an essential component of healthy and attractive physiques. For [the designer], beauty appears to reside even in an asymmetry that evokes the presence of medical pathologies.[236]

These "medical pathologies" to which Koda refers and Martin implies, are the deformities resulting from birth defects, leprosy and the contortions induced by madness. Certainly Kawakubo's garments share a similarity with Daniel Chodowiecki's illustrations for Johann Caspar Lavater's studies in psychopathology in the eighteenth century.

Chodowieki's *The Physiognomy of Illness and Deformity* takes as its theme the contrast and continuity of the normal and abnormal, with the tall, balanced central figure of the image as a symbol of normality while the lumpen, hunchback figures around him represent the strange and deviant.[237] Relevant here are comments made by philosopher Roland Barthes who argues that health is fashion. He writes: "Fashion is only ever perceived via its opposite: Fashion is health, it is a moral code of which the unfashionable is nothing but illness or perversion."[238] It is a concept also found in Veblen and Simmel's writings who both interpret those who dress in a socially conformist manner to be decent citizens, making fashion a social barometer of an individual's response to acknowledged social norms.

In a related statement, Nietzche describes the human responses to ugliness as one mixed up with a fear of decay brought on by ill health. He writes:

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[235] Brad Goldfarb 'Thoroughly modern match up - choreographer Merce Cunningham and designer Rei Kawakubo', *Interview*, October, 1997 see http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1285/is_n10_v27/ai_20803787/ Accessed 12.10.07
[236] Koda *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed* 113.
[237] Sander L. Gilman *Seeing the Insane* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc: New York, 1982): 65.
[238] Roland Barthes *The Language of Fashion*, (London and New York: Berg, 2006): 68.

a sign and symptom of degeneration ... Every suggestion of exhaustion, heaviness, senility, fatigue, any sort of lack of freedom, like convulsions or paralysis, especially smell, the colour, the form of dissolution, of decomposition ... all this provokes an identical reaction, the value judgement "ugly".[239]

The suggestion is, as far as Nietzsche outlines, that as a series of garments pushing outside the boundaries of the healthy human form, as in the Bump collection, represents chaos and the dissolution of the "normal" and the healthy. The collection thus represents a kind of wild, uncontainable vigor that seems to emanate from the clothing itself. It reminds us that we too constantly shed hair and skin and discard our unwanted solids and fluids, and take in the airs and toxins and other pure and adulterated materials of our environment. The garments reminds us that the surface of the skin is the largest organ of all, that we are a living, breathing body-subject, an organic animated body that will one day also be subject to its own messy breakdown and decay.

In addition, Koda writes that "Kawakubo's design underscores the fact that the uneasiness precipitated by her aesthetic does not simply derive from its distortion of the natural form but rather from the asymmetry she introduces."[240] Certainly Kawakubo's Bump collection addresses the myths and metaphors of fear surrounding the human form and the effects that "abnormal" body shapes generate. When looked at via the prism of "normality" the Bump collection is "out of control", it doesn't conform to accessible, wearable fashion and moves the body outside its usual margins, into atypical, highly visible and shared space. Thus any confrontation with garments from the Bump collection – should they be encountered in the flesh – would produce anxiety, guilt and embarrassment about relations with that abnormal body and thus the sanctity of one's own body as the garments move beyond the pre-defined margins frequently made clear in public space. Thus Aquinas, Nietzsche, Koda, Martin and Barthes suggest, the distortion of "normal" body shapes represent forms which are typically outside the accepted definition of beauty. In its use of

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[239] Tanner (ed) *The Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ: or How to Philosophize with a Hammer by Friedrich Nietzche* 90.
[240] Koda 'Rei Kawakubo and the Aesthetic of Poverty' 6.

distortion, the Bump collection enters into a dialogue with ugliness and yet again expands our understanding of its role and meaning for designers today.

Our "normal" experience of dress, as academic Joanne Entwistle notes, keeps "us aware of the 'edges', the limits and boundaries of our body", what she calls an "epidermic self-awareness" that makes us conscious of the exterior world via its relations to our skin.[241] Because the Bump collection represents a sense of disorder when compared with "normal" body shapes and because it "takes up space" not designated to it, it represents a loss of control over the body. For example, someone wearing many of the garments from the collection would not fit neatly in to the demarcated seats on a bus or in a theatre, or a telephone box or a crowded elevator. Instead, the garment leaks into the spaces outside of these zones, probing into the space of others and brushing up against them.

Deliberate distortions to the human form throughout the history of fashion suggest a desire to refigure bodily norms through a disfigurement of the anatomically "natural" silhouette. As Michel Foucault writes, "the care of the self appears … as an intensification of social relations" as society demands we remain vigilant about our appearance in proximity to others. The disorderly body – the sick, diseased, deformed and the ugly – invites alienation and even fear or repulsion.[242] Testing these limits, American artist Adrian Piper embarked on her seminal *Catalysis* series (1970) in which she physically transformed herself into an odd or repulsive person and went out in public to experience the frequently disdainful responses of others. These explorations involved roaming a department store or riding the subway while wearing clothes that reeked of noxious smells. Though photographs are all that remain of the *Catalysis* series, the work focused on the interaction between the artist and the public, and more specifically, on the negative reaction of individuals to anti-social actions. In these experiments with abject states, attention is directed to the process of self-presentation and the public's confusion, disgust and fear when faced with ambiguous behaviour. Likewise, as we have seen from Simmel and Veblen in previous chapters, the way we demonstrate control over the body is to show how

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[241] Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (eds) *Body Dressing* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 48.
[242] Foucault *The Care of the Self* 53.

we can be ordered through dress. For example, Eco has described the experience of wearing too-tight jeans as his garment "impos[ing] a demeanour" on him and "by focusing my attention on demeanour it obliged me to live towards the exterior world".[243]

The Bump collection – described as a "sartorial, gynaecological, emotional freak-out" by *ArtForum* – breaks these social rules and codes. [244] Because it refuses to conform, the Collection can be seen as a portal through which to explore an aesthetics of outsiderism and some of the attitudes regarding ugliness and poor looks as they relate to the disordered and distorted body.[245] Kawakubo's design has little resonance with mainstream fashion design of the late 1990s and even jars with a revival of interest at this time in re-exploring "unnatural" shapes such as the bustle. To further highlight the strangeness of the collection, mainstream street fashion during this period was characterised by a desire to dress simply and practically in "sanitized basic garments such as the parka and the multi-pocketed cargo pant".[246] According to Amy de la Haye at this point in time, "luxury gave rise to a whole new industry which derived its form from a range of garments [such as sports-wear] that traditionally had little, if any, fashion connotations".[247] Significantly, both styles share the sense of being "outside" fashion, but for very different reasons. Such sports-type clothing has an out-of-doors, adventure feel but as garments worn in predominately urban settings their multi-functionality and often camouflage colouring is rendered deliberately useless. Indeed, these features become ornamental. Ironically, should each pocket of the multi-pocketed pant actually be put to use, it would create a series of lumps and bumps over the body and a silhouette not so far removed from those garments produced by Kawakubo.

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[243] Umberto Eco *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*. William Weaver (trans) (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company 1983) 194.
[244] Hilton Als 'Bump and mind, Rei Kawakubo's Spring/Summer 1997 fashion collection' *ArtForum* December 1996: 167.
[245] Als 'Bump and mind, Rei Kawakubo's Spring/Summer 1997 fashion collection' 168.
[246] James Laver and Amy de la Haye, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002 [1969]) 284.
[247] Laver and de la Haye *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* 284. In 1998 Jean-Paul Gaultier produced 'The Charms of Frida Kahlo' collection spring-summer, 1998 which included larger panniered gowns. See firstview.com. In 1995 Yohji Yamamoto produced a crinoline dress, fall-winter 1995. Junya Watanabe produced a devolving pannier skirt for fall-winter 1998.

How we dress defines us. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that "Far from being merely an instrument or object in the world, our bodies are what give us our expression in the world".[248] In other words, our body is not just the place from which we come to experience the world, but it is through our bodies that we come to see and be seen by others. In "redesigning" the body as Kawakubo does to take on "abnormal" shapes and features, the Bump collection enters into a dialogue about how fashion can play a role in defining social status and thus also defining beauty and ugliness. Arguably individuals feel a social and moral imperative to perform their identity, including how appropriate behaviour and appropriate appearances are reiterated though dress choice. Dress forms a link between individual identity and the body and also forms an important connection between identity and social approval.[249] The result, is that the Bump collection is a kind of social outcast as it creates a new, socially disruptive envelope around the wearer and elucidates society's ability to shutdown that which doesn't conform.

So far we have surveyed how the reception of ugliness in fashion has shifted and morphed across the last two centuries. But the real focus of our attention has been the last thirty years or so with the establishment, consolidation and near-constant development as a contemporary fashion trend. Dressing poor is defined not just by *what* is worn but *how* it is worn. Ironically, the creased, crumpled, slovenly, sweaty and dirty are key features of this contemporary trend. However, we have witnessed that more often than not these special features are ersatz; the holes, tears and stains that signal poor looks are in fact new creations by designers who ravage the integrity of finished garments. Indeed, many of the big, mainstream brands are also keen to be part of this enduring fashion movement. Thus with all these "beautiful" depictions of so-called ugliness how is it not depicted with some fascination? That is, how do we understand the care and effort invested in the synthetically assembled appearance described as apparent ugliness? In the next Chapter we continue to find interest in the repugnant because the examples are captivating ruptures in our understanding of beauty and because they break established sartorial codes.

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[248] Entwistle and Wilson (eds) *Body Dressing* 44.
[249] Entwistle and Wilson (eds) *Body Dressing* 47.

An apparent ugliness taps feelings of empowerment and rebelliousness: emotions fostered by a consumer culture that in turn become vehicles for consumption.[250]

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[250] Illiouz "Emotions, Imagination and Consumption 393.

Chapter 4. Dressing Poor in the Media

Caroline Evans's 2003 book *Fashion At the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* remains a key text for thinking about the ruination of clothing for fashion and the continuing interest in dressing poor. She notes that during the 1990s a new kind of "conceptual" fashion designer evolved, "one who regularly worked with images of dereliction as a sign of mutability".[251] She suggests that a bohemian notion of poverty ("bo-ho chic") appealed to consumers whose "cultural capital allowed them to perceive the added value of clothes whose avant-garde aesthetic was distinct from the look of shiny newness, luxury and excess of mainstream fashion".[252] The consumption of such attire communicates a wearer's judgement of, and disinterest in, ostentation while acting as a sign of differentiation in their ability to de-code the look. Elizabeth Wilson has called this style of design the "aestheticisation of dystopia" and as symptomatic of a late twentieth-century malaise allied with post-modern existence, rendering Veblen's specific call for shiny newness finally out of step with fashion.[253]

Prior to the release of Evans's book, dressing poor was caricatured in the 1999 film *Zoolander*, directed by Ben Stiller. In this film, the story builds to the unveiling of a fashion designer's latest collection entitled "Derelict". It includes garments made from garbage bags and hats from garbage can lids. From the parodic perspective of the film, such as collection is seen as radical and thus

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[251] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 4–10.
[252] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 261.
[253] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 137.

successful as high fashion because it is so avant-garde. Obviously there is an air of absurdity here. Inversely, cyber-noir fantasy dramas such as *The Matrix*, also released in 1999, link what might be called an aesthetics of poverty with living in the realm of truth – in the case of this film – an obliterated, sunless and desolate world, rather than the realm of appearances and residual self-image.[254] The few characters who choose to inhabit a non-simulated reality live poorly as a way to maintain a grip on reality and as a sign of authenticity: their ranks are cold and unadorned, they eat miserable, tasteless gruel and wear oversized, fraying and dirty clothes riddled with holes. These scenes replay a notion of poverty valorised by Christian morality. The poverty and decay that consumerism seeks to mask in our world have been appropriated by fashion designers as a theme in their work, becoming at once a reaction to the treadmill of the fashion system and yet inevitably also as part of it. Both films take dressing poor as a point of departure for exploring new social frontiers and in exploring the same look in vastly different ways remind us that we can never speak of a specific fashion, only fashions.

Films such as *Zoolander* and *The Matrix* show how dressing poor has become so much a part of the visual landscape it can be stylised in popular film. Indeed, these films assist in the immortalisation of the look. While holes and tears are highly informal and signs of wear are signs of labour, these features have been commodified by labels such as Levi's and erased of their original meaning. As Michael Carter writes, "sartorial stylization can invoke the general by controlling the incidence of the particular without resorting to a brutal uniformity".[255] Dressing poor sets up not only an inverted, but a twisted, set of values. The soiled is made sophisticated, but only in appearance; stains are only stain shaped or stain coloured and give a stain effect. They don't smell or feel like stains. They are ornamental.

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254 Directed by the Wachowski Brothers.
255 Carter *Fashion Classics* 65.

Now we reach back into the wardrobe to source the next example for discussion. John Galliano's year 2000 spring/summer collection for the House of Dior – dubbed by the press as the Hobo collection – characterizes the trend for dressing poor as a new kind of ornamentation in its use of "newspaper"-trimmed trousers and "tobacco-stained" silks simulating aged, stained and weathered fabric, while accessories are fashioned from bottle caps and tea bags. Here the designer knowingly abuses the refined techniques and the skills of a workroom uniquely trained to hand make haute couture gowns. Instead, he asks his workroom to produce a collection that apes clothes more familiar to second hand shops or the wardrobes of those living on the street.[256] The collection resonates with a speculation by design theorist Anne Marie Willis, who writes:

> already more people are being made refugees as a result of changing environmental circumstances than by war or political conflict. With this evolving situation, might also disappear the privilege's perception of homeless people as an aberrant few (or many, depending on where) who clutter up downtown areas [sic]… In the extreme situation to come, the survival skills of the despised may become highly valued.[257]

Indeed Galliano, who claims to "like a little bit of bad taste"[258] was inspired by *les clochards*, the Parisian homeless, that he passed during his morning jogging sessions. Upon reflecting on their lifestyle he declared his aim was to expose the pure decadence of the couture business by "turning it inside out".[259] With this collection, said Galliano, "a tiara made of candy wrappers is as valuable as one made of diamonds".[260] Although exploring poor looks through an atypical fashion muse with questionable agency – the resourcefulness of the destitute as Willis notes – the collection was intended as a critique of the fashion industry from within.

Predictably perhaps, Galliano was heartily criticised by homelessness workers who picketed the designer's office for his perceived cynicism and lack of

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[256] Eco *The History of Beauty* 407.
[257] www.desphilosophy.com/dpp/dpp_journal/editorial/body.html Accessed 5.12.2005
[258] http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0BDW/is_26_42/ai_76333304 Accessed 18.11.05
[259] http://www.geocities.com/sylvie_fashion3/gallianoE.html Accessed 18.11.05
[260] http://projects.is.asu.edu/pipermail/hpn/2000-February/000070.html 18.11.05

understanding. Arnold Cohen, president and CEO of the Partnership for the Homeless in New York, commented:

> John Galliano doesn't really understand how homelessness devastates people. The homeless wrap themselves in newspaper and ripped sacks because that's all they have ... People are on the street or in shelters because they've lost everything. It's a matter of social dysfunction.[261]

Like Cohen, Australian academic Joanne Finkelstein decries:

> these allusions to fascism, poverty, dislocation and violence in a Europe not only concerned about its undeclared wars in Bosnia and further east but also about its expanding underclass have been regarded by the international media as inexcusably callous.[262]

For the picketers, the contradictions wrapped up in this collection were too much: in utilising hundreds of hours of production time and the well-honed skills of the Dior workroom to handcraft garments that are twisted and worn, to expose seams, disfigure corsetry boning, unravel oversized hats, leave hems unfinished, create tears, rips, cigarette burns and distress surfaces Galliano had arguably heightened, rather than highlighted the decadence that drives the couture industry. He put a spotlight on that which differentiates high fashion so clearly from those outside it and their much reduced social mobility.[263]

Ironically, the House of Dior was also picketed in 1947 when it launched the New Look, with its sculptured, cinched waist and full skirt that scraped the ankles. To women living in the ruins of post-war Europe and still wearing utilitarian wartime dress, it was shocking in its excess. A model wearing the New Look for a photoshoot in Montmartre, Paris, was set upon by bystanders,

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[261] Robyn Healy. 'Christian Dior Dressing the National Gallery of Victoria, *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, 43, 2003: 98.

[262] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 19.

[263] Healy 'Christian Dior Dressing the National Gallery of Victoria' 100. In 2003 the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, purchased a dress from Galliano's "Hobo collection" as a couture client. The dress selected appears worn as it is patched with brocade like "mended tears" and is lacquered, casting a masking layer like dust across its surface. Indeed, it seems to belong to another age. Thus for Healy, Galliano's outfit references a cycle of change, where a dress, clearly meant for the upper classes, has been slowly degraded and is now only fit for those on the lower rungs of society. While referencing the tatters of the lower classes, Galliano's collection also recalls the decadence of the nineteenth century rag balls where French aristocrats played fancy dress in the garb of the less fortunate.

furious at the unnecessary use of fabric during a time of rationing. Dior's designs also met with resistance in England and the US, where a tabloid war was waged against lengthening hemlines and Americans waved placards reading "Christian Dior: go home!"[264] The hostility on the streets towards such opulence and innovation was in glaring contrast to the delight of the wealthy elite who flocked to Dior and ensured the fledgling house turned a profit within days of showing its first collection.[265]

One of the best-known recent examples of the celebrity rich dressing poor is American actress Mary-Kate Olsen whose style provoked headlines including "Mary-Kate Olsen Makes 'Homeless Chic' Look Good".[266] According to the article, the style of the young actress may be described as "grungy and a little bit dotty" or looking like "a 'homeless' copycat" and her ensemble formed as the result of "dumpster diving".[267] Inversely, *The New York Times* quoted stylist Karen Berenson as saying: "The Olsens are the real thing. (Mary-Kate) makes skinny girls in baggy clothes look cool." The article notes that the girls were "likely to become the front-runners for Earl Blackwell's worst-dressed list" but praises them for making up "their own style wearing all those dust-catcher skirts and street-sweeping cable-knit cardigans, trousers and floppy hats".[268] The effect, according to the *New York Times* was: "stylish young women used to wear Gucci or Prada head to toe. Today they are more apt to be seen at supermarkets or parties toting a beat-up Chloé bag, their eyes shaded by enormous, high-priced Laura Biaggiotti sunglasses, the faint suggestion of opulence hidden beneath chadorlike layers of cashmere and ankle-length peasant skirts. These days you just feel stupid and shallow walking around with a $1,000 bag."[269] Thus the style and make-up of the young actress at first received disapproval from critics and fans, but her Bobo (bohemian and bourgeois) style finally found its acceptance when understood as being socially

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[264] Edwina McCann 'The Legacy of Christian Dior' *The Australian* 1 December 2007.
[265] McCann 'The Legacy of Christian Dior' 2007.
[266] http://www.factio-magazine.com/specialfeatures/des___MaryKateHomelessChic.htm Accessed 4.1.09
[267] http://www.factio-magazine.com/specialfeatures/des___MaryKateHomelessChic.htm Accessed 4.1.09
[268] http://www.factio-magazine.com/specialfeatures/des___MaryKateHomelessChic.htm Accessed 4.1.09
[269] http://www.factio-magazine.com/specialfeatures/des___MaryKateHomelessChic.htm Accessed 4.1.09

or even politically motivated.[270]

Author Lauren Stover has also noted the trend, which has appear in moneyed communities from Beverly Hills to the Upper West Side still in 2005, where young women wear grandma's crocheted shawl, moth-eaten cashmere sweaters and scuffed cowboy boots. "It's perfectly fine to look like a bag lady," Stover writes.[271] The look flies in the face of the conventions of elegance that have dominated fashion since the early Renaissance. More importantly, it seems to address the discomfort of a younger generation with overt displays of wealth.[272]

The poor look reflects, absorbs and promotes more complex messages, unlike some other trends that seek a unidirectional relationship between wearer and viewer based on inspiring emulation. While the look may attract scorn and mockery because of its unusual promotion of dereliction (and most trends have their deriders) the poor look differs again. Because it mimics the look of poverty and a group outside the fashion system it is open to a different kind of criticism, and thus worthy of a different kind of attention. Dressing poor is not the opposite of luxe looks that encourage young women and teens to wear pearls or long box pleat skirts, as in the Sloan Ranger trend.[273] In that instance the already wealthy mimic royalty, a group well inside fashion. Instead, the poor look engages only with appearances, as artist Philip Brophy writes:

> Just in case you missed the point, such hard core fashion statements do indirectly exploit the aesthetic fall-out from dreggy people most of you would cross the street to avoid ... Ever since Richard Avedon took shoots of gorgeous peacock women striking a pose next to dumpy wog peasants, the template has been regularly applied: contrast beauty against its absence. Reduced to such binary polarities, style can become too easy and too obvious. Everyone gets hung up on playing out their opposite,

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[270] http://www.factio-magazine.com/specialfeatures/des___MaryKateHomelessChic.htm Accessed 4.1.09
[271] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/fashion/06olsen.html Accessed 4.1.09
[272] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/fashion/06olsen.html Accessed 4.1.09
[273] The term Sloane Ranger refers to a stereotype in the UK of young, upper class or upper-middle-class women or men who share distinctive and common lifestyle traits. The term is a punning combination of "Sloane Square," a location in Chelsea famed for the wealth of residents and frequenters, and the television Westerns character The Lone Ranger.
Initially the term "Sloane Ranger" was used mostly in reference to women, a particular archetype being Diana, Princess of Wales.

their other, the nightmare that can't haunt them because they visited it first.[274]

Just as Brophy describes, labels frequently give themselves an edge through the juxtaposition of their designs with the old and the ugly. Caroline Baker – art director for the fashion magazine *Nova* – published this headline in December 1971: "Every hobo should have one" using inner-city dereliction as the background for a story featuring a model posing as a tramp – but wearing the most glamorous of furs. Similarly, Comme des Garçons's world-wide corporate advertising campaign in 1990 depicted young Georgian women wearing their product but juxtaposed with friends and older family members in garments we are lead to believe are "peasant gear" but which are almost indistinguishable from Comme des Garçons' own collection.

It is an approach which lit a slow-burning but remarkably powerful fuse in fashion magazines that reached saturation point during the 1990s in alternative magazines such as *i-D, The Face, Dazed and Confused, Wallpaper, Tank, Purple, W* and even mainstream publications such as *Italian Vogue* and *L'Uomo Vogue*.[275] These publications regularly published images of high fashion set within scenes of urban dereliction. Comme des Garçons's fashion shoot in Georgia, for example, also signalled another shift in the designer seeking new ways to shock their clientele in that not only is the setting for their fashion shoot unusual but so was the model. The effect of their appearance is significant and two-fold, at least. These new faces simultaneously signify an unconventional snub to the idealised form of the fashion model while forming a unique marketing strategy designed to appeal to a sophisticated, image-savvy demographic. The appearance of average and unusual looks in advertisements for domestic goods and services is now commonplace. The very ordinariness of these people stands for reliability in the products they market, while quirky or quaint looks provide the memorable twist to a new product size, flavour or deal.

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[274] Philip Brophy Op Shop Culture: Aesthetics In Mothballs (Melbouren in Like No.1, Melbourne, 1996) [online version]

[275] McDowell *Fashion Today* (London: Phaidon 2000) 206.

Fashion advertising, however, is generally not concerned with the register of the everyday or with facts. Julian Stallabrass suggests the unlikely nature of the effect when he writes, "Advertisements may deal sometimes with disturbing or even horrific imagery, but it is more difficult to imagine them dealing with something which is their precise obverse: with the fragmented, aged, dirty … with the discarded".[276] But, in a radical development that obfuscates fashion's obsession with fantasy, fabulous nobodies – the old, the plump, the poor and the ugly – redirect consumer desire through the medium of the "ordinary person". In a more generalised discussion around advertising, Robert Goldman also debates the use of imperfection as part of an effort to signify the real and suggests that "alternative" forms, though they may initially be seen as radical, are inevitably "instrumentalized into another marketing ploy aimed at extending the commodification of desire."[277]

The most notorious example of a "realist" approach to fashion photography at the end of the twentieth century was so-called "heroin chic", an "anti-fashion" style of imagery dwelling upon the androgynous, the too-skinny and the deathly looking. It was a look that flirted with grunge music, squatting and drugs. Rebecca Arnold's comments distil the attitude of many fashion photographers during this period. On Juergen Teller's fashion work she writes, "they express the 1990s obsession with images that are "real", that are harshly lit, exposing the skin as mottled and tired, showing up bruises and flaws rather than smoothing away any sign of the living/dying flesh".[278] These photographs have been widely understood as symptomatic of a late twentieth-century malaise and reflect the banalities, anxieties and feelings of alienation associated with everyday life at the turn of the millennium.[279] Heroin chic was even taken up by large fashion houses such as Prada whose print advertisement models were variously thin, faux-scruffy, alienated and withdrawn. In this type of advertisement, the dysfunctional, the depressed or the diaster-prone made the

[276] Stallabrass *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* 184
[277] Robert Goldman *Reading Ads Socially* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 171.
[278] Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* 82.
[279] Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* 82.

crossover to commercial advertising from minority, low-circulation magazines.[280]

Much fashion photography throughout the 1990s was created in tandem with the work of fashion designers whose explicitly deconstructed garments helped give form to this new, often harsh realism in fashion imagery. Evans captures this moment when she writes, "In the 1990s the perfect body of mainstream fashion was progressively challenged by the abject, fissured and traumatised body of more cutting-edge fashion, another form of the return of the repressed…".[281] At this time the aesthetics of boro boro, meaning ragged, tattered, worn out or dilapidated, was also developed by the Japanese textile company Nuno. Their textiles were boiled, shredded, dropped in acid or slashed with blades. [282] A certain contemporary cultural instability was reiterated within fashion photography from society itself, as it was in contemporary art and cinema over the same period via the work of artists and directors such as Mike Kelley, Thomas Hirschhorn and Gus Van Sant.

While based on a kind of realism, heroin chic and other "anti-fashion" fashion trends were in part a backlash against society's stereotypes, an excessiveness characterised by the 1980s and the dominance of the supermodel. From around 1990, a surge of interest in Christy Turlington, Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Claudia Schiffer and Cindy Crawford, promoted the women into a superior class that expressed a club-like mentality, a business drive and a "born to rule" attitude. While distinguishable as different women, the group epitomised "techniques of wearing the body", that is, they promoted a formulaic recipe for a "technical beauty" with a Darwinian undertone: tall, thin, rich.[283] Later that decade, the inclusion of Kate Moss – the unknown waif with crooked features – signalled a thirst for variety in the face of fashion and brought a sense of performativity to fashion photography. Like Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton before her, Moss embodied the fairytale switch from "found" woman-child into

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[280] Evans *Fashion At the Edge* 205.
[281] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 94.
[282] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 249.
[283] Jennifer Craik *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London and New York: Routledge 1993) 91

professional model before the eyes of magazine readers seduced by the possibility of continuous self-transformation.

In 1932 Cecil Beaton bemoaned the impossibility of depicting models as "very elegant women taking grit out of their eyes, or blowing their noses, or taking lipstick off their teeth ... It would be gorgeous, instead of illustrating a woman in a sport suit in a studio, to take the same woman in the same suit in a motor accident, with gore all over everything and bits of the car here and there. But naturally that would be forbidden."[284] Today, however, models are regularly shown doing just those things, and much more. In Juergen Teller's infamous "Versace" images of Kristen McMenemy from 1996, she is shown naked, bruised, cut and, in some shots, with a tampon string hanging from between her legs. What might have seemed wholly taboo to Beaton in the 1930s has become reality, and models have been photographed in what look like post-rape and abuse scenarios. A number of photographers including Teller and, notably, Izima Kaoru, have even pictured models and celebrities as if they are dead.

Fashion photography that traffics with the truly everyday, the unflattering and the flawed and which engages non-professionals would seem to be a reflexive and historically significant "intervention" in visualising fashion and beauty, a sign of life that eclipses the alienation and anxieties associated with the aspirations for perfection promoted by a capitalist ethos. Such imagery posits everyday people and their plain, clumsy, chubby, wrinkly or dysmorphic bodies against the commodity ideal. As a result, their appearance prompts a range of psychic, voyeuristic and fetishistic affects that re-route the intricately orchestrated spectatorial desire associated with the expected subjects of fashion photography. Evolving social dynamics can help us to understand the changing appearance of fashion photography, as fashion historian Gilles Lipovetsky suggests:

> To be sure, the dynamic of postmodern, individualistic culture has not eliminated the artificiality of the fashion photo, but it has freed it from the old imperative of ostentatious aestheticism by allowing greater

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[284] Beaton quoted in Nancy Hall-Duncan *The History of Fashion Photography* (New York: H.N. Abrams 1979) 202.

> openness to intimate sensations, inner feelings, unusual fantasies,
> physical suffering, and individual imperfections.[285]

But is the injection of "physical suffering and individual imperfections" into the fashion photograph a convincing alternative to "ostentatious aestheticism" as Lipovetsky suggests? Arguably, images that lack professional models may still be incorporated by a desire for innovative marketing precisely because of fashion's, and as a result fashion photography's commercially-driven imperative for novelty. The amateur becomes a signifier of their own instability and innate artificiality, rather than a figure of intimacy and individuality as their role is reduced to one of transparent shock or subversion. This is also a core impetus of the poor look. Non-professionals speak the truth of the lie: eschewing reality, paradoxically, is the reality of fashion photography. Models do not resemble real men and women, they resemble each other. Fashion photographers' use of non-professionals – their friends, street kids, the disabled, the elderly, overweight teens, the ugly and the poor – are at the core of the metastructure of referent systems designed for the savvy alternative press subscription. That is, the non-model tends to appear in the context of the deliberately opaque "non-ad", a "minority method of advertising" designed "to sell us a commodity-sign".[286]

A recent example of an attempt to undermine the promotion of unattainable beauty in this way can be found in Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" which focused on six "real" women, sending the message that overweight or older bodies are no longer to be feared or shunned. Simultaneously, however, the Dove advertisements fetishize common traits – grey hair, freckles, scars – as a sign of their commitment to the "average" woman without venturing toward the complete spectrum of "normality" that includes obesity, disability and deformity. The advertisements signal how mutability itself has become charged with meaning when it embodies shifts in current social concerns.

There is, however, a difference between the "warts and all", "dirty realist" fashion photography so significant to the 1990s (epitomised by photographers such as Nigel Shafran and David Simms and Corrine Day's images of the as-yet-

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[285] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 9
[286] Goldman *Reading Ads Socially* 157.

unheard-of Kate Moss in her dank flat) and the use of non-professional models. As stylist Elliott Smedley laments, "realist fashion imagery did not, and does not, go as far as it might".[287] The power of the typical fashion model derives from the gap that exists, that must exist, between professional models and "average" readers in order to propagate desire. The professional model is an object, human flesh turned into an image. The non-model can be understood as yet another facet of an innovative photographer's oeuvre and a marketing tool that seeks to subvert the mainstream but in fact relies on the same drive for novelty and the same appeal to commodity fetishism at the level of the sign. Indeed, the non-professional may actually represent a kind of hyper-conformism: he or she underlies that fact that the power of appearances, whether typical or not, rests in their ability to fascinate and dazzle.

At the end of the twentieth century, as Lipovetsky sees it, "the body has become an obsession, a primary concern", which, amongst other phenomena, has "liberated fashion photography from the need to promote clothing as its central focus."[288] Indeed, the body is the surface on which objects of consumption get inscribed and acquire their social meaning. It is through the body that objects take on their social significance and are integrated in a dynamics of "social distinction".[289]

Certainly magazines such as *Dazed and Confused* have found success in not just selling products but, rather, selling their sophisticated readership themselves as they consume their own knowingness. Photographs such as Knight's reveal a desire to promote and enjoy the unconventional. As he argues, "*Vogue* talks to me about photographing the modern urban woman.... Well, the modern urban woman has breast cancer, or is in a car crash. But that's not the woman I'm photographing for *Vogue*. So there's a balance that needs redressing".[290] In Knight's images, the flawed body of the non-professional is a form of positive differentiation signalling agency, power and risk. These models display a

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[287] Elliott Smedley 'Escaping to Reality: Fashion photography in the 1990s' in Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (eds) *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge 2000) 155.
[288] Lipovetsky *The Empire of Fashion* 9
[289] Illiouz 'Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A new research agenda' 384.
[290] Nick Knight 'Fashion: Show stoppers' *The Independent on Sunday*, September 29 2000.

confidence and individuality that wrestles with the pursuit of the perceived ideal body while highlighting the cyclic effect of a quest predicated on a mixture of narcissism and self-loathing.[291]

The non-professional is an interloper, a part-timer in the world of fashion. They are defined by more than their image, where the professional model has *become* their image. As one model states, "You exist through others' eyes. When they stop looking at you, there's nothing left".[292] Rather than strict imitation, the non-professional's explicit lack of perfection and their novelty, a fact heightened in Knight's images, can be relished as a mode of knowing parody apparently beyond morality and politics. His photographs of athlete and model Aimee Mullins, most particularly, forge a strange and emotional condition of attraction to her good looks and bare torso, repulsion at her limbless stumps and shame at how the gaze, while conditioned not to stare, is in fact invited to the scopophilic comfort zone that is fashion photography.

In a shoot from 2003, republished in *Fashion Magazine*, Martin Parr captures shoppers with their limp, unwashed hair and droopy faces at the Somerfield supermarket chain wearing Karen Walker, Playboy and Nike. The clothing credit lines at the bottom of each page are the only element that drags the photograph into the realm of fashion from the world of documentary. The subjects, who continue their everyday activities with only a change in clothing to indicate their new role as models, sour the untouchability and allure of the designer garments. They neither pose for Parr nor address his camera, creating images that reveal the mutant qualities of fashion as it seamlessly moves from commodity to image and then to sign before the lens. Once a sign – a cultural marker, an intangible symbol – the fashion photograph, as Parr reveals, may operate alternately as a brand tool and artwork, simultaneously attracting seduction and repugnance as a discordant unpleasure.

Fashion photographers like Guy Bourdin made their fame by adopting a surrealist-inspired aesthetic of juxtapositions and a central strategy of

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[291] Craik *The Face of Fashion* 85
[292] Barbara Rudolph 'Marketing Beauty and The Bucks' *Time* 138/14 Oct 7, 40

combining unrelated elements in a single image context. In Parr's fashion photographs, not only is the setting unexpected, but so are the models themselves. In the "Accessories" section of *Fashion Magazine*, a spread on Spring 2005 shoes features brand-name footwear modelled by non-professionals, cropped so that only their feet appear on the page. Chanel's "Elephant" sandals are sported by women with rough heels, stumpy toenails and sun-spotted skin; over-sized veins poke through the gaps in printed cotton Alaïa wedges; a hairy foot models the latest pair from Marni and images of shoes by Kenzo and Louis Vuitton are blurry and out of focus.

Settings at odds with the usual depiction of fashionable garments were pioneered by photographers such as Beaton, who in the 1940s posed beautiful women in London's bomb-scarred ruins. However, by placing the product on *someone* unexpected, novelty becomes a force at work within the image, consumed with a delicious sense of irony by a knowing clientele. While "difference" may be central to a politically and aesthetically provocative style of fashion photography it is also a commodifiable spectacle. In the context of the fashion magazine, where perfection is a supreme and repetitious ideology, the non-professional is an anomaly, a scrabbling of the code. Importantly, this style rarely penetrates the big-circulation magazines and remains the province of independent publications which cultivate a clever "anti-fashion" even "anti-model" rhetoric. These magazines form a triumvirate with photographers, who often move freely between the fashion and art worlds, and designers who make garments refusing perfection through an aesthetics of ruination. As Evans notes "in a apparent revulsion against the Beautiful, recent generations of photographers prefer to show disorder, prefer to distil an anecdote, more often than not a disturbing one, rather than an ultimately reassuring, 'simplified form'".[293] As might be expected, an enduring interest in the aesthetic of the repressed only reiterates the notion that there will never be any one quantifiable ideal of beauty, only views onto it. The project that is picturing beauty – arguably the project of fashion photography – is therefore splintered into simulacral shards which see but which cannot be entirely seen.

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[293] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 194.

Masquerading as a fashion model before the reader, the non-professional plays out many of the fantasies and desires that constitute fashion photography itself, creating a relay of effects and a dissolution of the non-model's subjectivity through reflections – much like the experience of watching the pseudo-famous participants of reality television who *act* themselves for an audience. Perhaps a similar mimicry was to be expected as the latest vampiric act in an avant-garde advertising that seeks to confuse the borders of art and life. With strangely ordinary, discordantly normal people inside the fashion we have been lead to believe is so desirable, contemporary fashion photography makes the real a complex and potentially shadowy ideal.

The wave of imagery involving amateur models might also be considered in relation to another current cultural context, that of reality television and other "reality" portraiture facilitated by new technologies: camera phones, personalised websites, webcams and blogs. Like reality television, the appearance of non-professional models reflects a simultaneous obsession with manufacturing celebrities out of ordinary people, or with celebrities caught out doing ordinary things that supposedly render them more "real" or "human".

Fashion blogs

Helsinki-based blog Hel Looks catalogues the city's cool set via snaps of selected street fashions. Begun in 2005, the project, by Liisa Jokinen and Sampo Karjalainen, is a tribute to *Fruits* and *Street* magazines, pioneers of street fashion photography.[294] Frequently, those captured on the blog declare their desire to reference or reflect the appearance of the homeless or iterant. For example, many claim that their style has a "ragamuffin-likeness" or that they are "inspired by vagabonds". Other suggest that they like their clothes to be "a bit dirty", that they "need be resourceful and innovative because [they are] penniless" or even that they like clothes "that are ugly, yet somehow beautiful" or "wrong and ugly". Niclas (22) declares, "Winos and bums have a great style: random and relaxed".[295] The subjects for Hel Looks are found at exhibition openings, store launches, festivals or in trendy parts of city, outside of the most

[294] www.hel-looks.com accessed 22.06.09.
[295] www.hel-looks.com accessed 8.06.09.

experimental fashion stores selling new and second hand clothes. The bloggers, Jokinen and Karjalainen, are interested in capturing the fashionable youth of Helsinki and via Hel Looks they paint a picture of the city's middle-class tastes and aspirations

The journey from the particular and personal through to the impersonality of a general beauty have implications for how clothes are made, what they are made from and how they are shaped, coloured and patterned. Simmel refers to the forms in which clothing presents itself to us as "the material means of its social purpose".[296] This framework for understanding the poor aesthetic throws up significant questions. Dressing poor is a statement because it is always in opposition to the wearer's status in much the same way that second-hand style continually emphasizes its distance from second-hand clothing.[297] Dressing poor immediately signals one's middle or upper class status. The poor cannot partake in the aesthetics of poverty and the look of dressing down simply by definition. Dressing poor is not a condition, it is a style. Take, for example, the website Homeless Chic (www.homelesschic.com).

While the site photographs people in the same street-fashion mode as Hel Looks, the subjects are homeless people whom the site owners have deemed worthy of attention. Although the subjects of Hel Looks personally explain their own style choices, the people featured on Homeless Chic are captured purely as visual examples of "authentic" poor looks. According to the owners of Homesless Chic.com:

> The purpose of this site is to catalog images of people living on the street that exhibit a unique sense of personal style. In no way is this effort made with the intention of mockery, but rather as a source of inspiration and social study. In this day and age with so many of us walking around using our expensive wardrobe to indicate which peer group we belong to or how well we respond to advertising, it's refreshing to see those that are free of influence express just that. Their ability to shine in their own special way despite their circumstances reminds us all that it doesn't take a bankroll to look oh-so-good. These are the real artisanal risk-takers,

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[296] Carter *Fashion Classics* 65.
[297] Angela McRobbie. 'Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket' in Angela McRobbie (ed.) *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) 1989: 29.

experts in the art of found object and proof once again that true style comes from within. We have decided to make the distinction of "homeless" as anybody that appears to be living on the street, has indicated such or has been witnessed asking strangers for financial assistance (panhandling). When possible, we make all efforts to compensate our subjects with some form of aid in exchange for the privilege of photographing them. Photo contributions to this project are encouraged if you approach with the same keen eye and positive intention as we do.[298]

Critically absent from Homeless Chic is the suggestion that subjects have not chosen to dress the way they do, but rather they have merely dressed in the little they do own and coincidently recall the trend for dressing poor. Heavily Romanticised, the bloggers suggest that the appearance of those they photograph results from some inherent "artisanal" style.

As the "source" of poor looks, these homeless figures capture the interest of the bloggers as a novel interruption to the well understood street fashion blog type. Although these homeless people are photographed as they are found, the bloggers suggest that they are in fact ironically wearing a style of dress with high fashion credentials. A suggestion born out by the caption for this image: "If Ms. Kawakubo sees these you'll know what to expect next season. SUCH the good look. We're loving those gross 90's Fila leftovers, seriously".[299]

Hel Looks and Homeless Chic highlight a radical shift in key in fashion photography, and within the realm of imaging fashion and its detour through ugliness. Today, the non-professional fashion model and their everyday looks are a fixture of the landscape of contemporary fashion imagery and a signifier of the growing importance and power of ugliness as a rupture to fashion's smooth, unchanging face.

Novelty is central to almost all the episodes or phases of dressing poor from ancient Rome to now. But, as we have seen, the purpose of its novelty and its effects are very different in different eras. Dressing poor is a paradigm for the exploitation, and often sanction, of social rank, it imitates *and* it differentiates between social groups. Additionally, dressing poor is an extreme novelty – it is

[298] www.homelesschic.com Accessed 20.06.08
[299] www.homelesschic.com Accessed 20.06.08

an experiential and emotional commodity that speeds up the cyclical passage from excitement to comfort and from there to boredom, which in turn results in a new cycle of excitement, comfort and boredom: the very definition of consumption.[300] Fashion has a commercially-driven imperative for novelty and uses its tantalising qualities as a form of seduction, rendering it both cause and effect of any look it apes or inspires.

Retail Spaces

While many designers have used rubbish as a creative material or artfully "trashed" their collections to give the appearance of wear and tear, the built context for this fashion has also been explored by designers in order to present their work, thus derelict retail spaces are also part of understanding fashion's relationship with ugliness. Martin Margiela, for example, was one of the pioneers of using derelict urban spaces as the site of fashion parades during the early 1990s. In a counterpoint to the traditional runway as the stage for his shows, the Belgian designer once notoriously presented his collection in a Salvation Army Warehouse, an address that many fashion journalists misread as a prank invitation and failed to turn up.[301]

Vivienne Westwood claims that fashion is no longer to be purchased from the rack, it must be constructed from bits and pieces, it must arise from opportunity.[302] To replace the fashion system with Westwood's idea of costuming would necessitate a shift in the sources of identity and to reject mass produced fashion in favour of idiosyncratic self-fashioning. To embrace costuming would make us more resilient to other people's opinions about our appearance; it would encourage an anarchism of attire, or so Westwood claimed. Indeed, public clothing exchange events – the notion of swap-to-shop – are gaining momentum and encourage those with clothes in good condition, but which might have been "poor" fashion buys, to exchange them with others rather than throwing them away.[303] Here second hand clothes store and release value as required. This, in turn, challenges the international economy of fashion

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[300] Illiouz "Emotions, Imagination and Consumption 390.
[301] Evans *Fashion at the Edge* 250.
[302] Finkelstein, *Slaves of Chic* 118.
[303] See http://clothingexchange.wordpress.com/

and in the extreme, such attitudes would close the department store and recuperate the bazaar, or even the gutter or the dumpster as the place to find fashion.[304]

Westwood and McLaren's first shop; Let It Rock, as with their subsequent stores, took on many aspects of the bazaar, acting as a stage set or highly-directed space where a physical location helped to grow the concepts the pair explored through clothing. In almost all aspects the stores were anarchic; they kept irregular opening hours, display items were often in fact stolen goods and customers were told that clothes weren't for sale, even though they were on show.[305] As Marco Pirroni, of the group Adam and the Ants whom McLaren later managed, recalls:

> The King's Road shop Vivienne ran with Malcolm was unlike anything else going on in England at the time. The country was a morass of beige and cream Bri-Nylon and their shop was an oasis. I went in every week. If you shopped there, you didn't go anywhere else.[306]

In their shops, McLaren and Westwood *spatially* explored ideas and created a place for the community they formed around themselves to see one another and to feed off each other's interests. As Pirroni's regular trips to the Let It Rock shop suggest, the feelings and behaviour inspired by 430 Kings Road rendered it a kind of clubhouse or faction headquarters.

Fast forward more than thirty years. Starting with Berlin on February 14th 2004, Barcelona on March 12th 2004, and Singapore on 22 May 2004, Comme des Garçons opened Guerrilla Stores in exocentric, energetic and marginal areas in several different cities around the globe. There have now been Comme des Garçons Guerrilla Stores in Hong Kong, Copenhagen, Reykjavik, Cologne Berlin, Barcelona, Helsinki, Singapore, Stockholm, Ljubljana and Warsaw. Each temporary "pop-up" store is guided by the same philosophy and basic rules

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[304] Finkelstein *Slaves of Chic* 119.
[305] http://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/may2001_andrew_wade_interview.html Accessed 1.5.10
[306] Wilcox *Vivienne Westwood* 12.

which are made public that emphasise the ephemeral, the difficult, the left-over and the incomplete:

> 1. The guerrilla store will last no more than one year in any given location.
> 2. The concept for interior design will be largely equal to the existing space.
> 3. The location will be chosen according to its atmosphere, historical connection, geographical situation away from established commercial areas or some other interesting feature.
> 4. The merchandise will be a mix of all seasons, new and old, clothing and accessories, existing or specially created, from CDG's brands and eventually other brands as well.
> 5. The partners will take responsibility for the lease and CDG will support the store with merchandise on a sale or return basis.

The shops, installed in raw urban spaces – the Berlin outpost occupied a former bookstore; the Helsinki store a 1950s chemist – sell "seasonless" merchandise drawn from current and past collections. As the "rules" indicate, the shops must remain largely untouched by architects and interior designers and are required to close after one year.[307] These are interiors that leave no traces, no memory. Like all anti-fashion, fashion statements they are intriguing because of their very lack of design as a design itself when compared with the relentlessly similar retail cues harnessed by franchises around the world to put customers at ease.

Guerrilla retailing is also smart business, allowing companies to tap into new markets at low cost (rents are cheap; advertising is nil) and to reduce stock levels by recycling old merchandise. The concept is to propose to the local community surrounding each shop an array of interesting and creative merchandise in a novel way, that is not beholden to any traditional industry dictates. What counts is the choice of goods, the spirit and the energy, rather than the appearance of carefully designed interiors. Comme des Garçons's down-at-the-heel guerrilla stores also assist the multi-million dollar empire to maintain its semi-anarchic qualities and anti-fashion credentials. Equally, these stores feed into the desires of Comme des Garçons loyalists who see themselves as outside mainstream fashion by engaging with these only comparatively distinctive retail strategies.

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[307] http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/12/magazine/12ANTI.html?_r=1 Accessed 3.4.07

Contemporary ruins in architecture and interior design today represent a kind of backlash against the smooth surfaces and luxurious fabrics traditionally desired by those few who can afford to live and work in designer-made spaces. The example of the Let It Rock shop as a kind of gathering place remains relevant. Today many retail spaces also run designer-in-residence programs, workshops, lectures, galleries, cafes and other in-store events giving shoppers more and more reason to continue to return through a greater a breadth of activity not only focused on clothing. Here fashion is equated with other kinds of lifestyle marketing and shopping is transformed into a form of membership.

Many of the garments pulled from the imaginary wardrobe and described here are radical in that they are also functional. They remain compelling in their self-destructive impulses in that they are geared politically, to make statements about society, design and youth culture. Typically, the kind of creative destruction outlined has no ostensible function, except as ornamentation.[308] The mundane could be redeemed for resistance against societal, or at the very least, parental norms through strategies of damage and personalization.[309] Thus ugliness in fashion reflects a social condition where identity itself has become a symbolic garment that can be taken on and off.

[308] See Joseph Schumpeter *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1975) [orig. pub. 1942] 82-85.
[309] Townsend *Rapture* 44.

Conclusion

As the writing of this thesis comes to a conclusion we are able to add two very new items to the imaginary wardrobe: Vivienne Westwood's latest collection is inspired by the homeless and Luis Vuitton's newest range of accessories is modelled on garbage bags. The later, which sell for more than 1000 pounds each, contribute to a look blurring social status, the value of style and the role of novelty. Dressing poor seems to refuse to be this or that and in representing both fictitious and non-fictitious truths, the garments drawn from the wardrobe are objects for and about our time. They create highly conceptual and creative works that engage with, and sometimes dismantle, the meaning of appearance. I have argued that the trend for dressing poor produces a critical discourse about role and importance of dress in society to the formation of moral codes and the maintenance of divisions in class status. This look offers us more than meets the eye.

Frederic Jameson would argue, however, that the realm of constant quotation – a zone exemplified by Luis Vuitton's 'Raindrop Besace' "bin liners" – is a refusal to engage the present or to think historically. It is a logic that renders dressing poor part of an unsustainable cycle of consumption that he would regard as characteristic of the "schizophrenia" of consumer society. For Jameson this is where the self becomes "schizo" or "pure screen ... for all the surrounding networks of influence".[310] The poverty and decay that consumerism seeks to mask, Jameson's "pure screen", has been appropriated by designers as a theme in their work, becoming at once a reaction to the unjust and inequitable

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[310] Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press 1983) xiv.

elements of contemporary life and yet, as I have also argued, inevitably a fashion trend – whether named recession dressing, slumming or grunge, it is also a consumable.[311]

Similarly, Robin Givhan suggests that dressing poor becomes a desirable trend to the point of perversity or schizophrenia when she writes:

> Customers aren't really supposed to like these clothes. This is fashion with a message, a point of view. There are plenty of pretty frocks already in the stores. These clothes are intended to make folks rethink their notion of beauty, reassess their idea of fashion (and, of course, give them something completely different to buy). Perhaps this is why ugly has passed muster as intellectual fashion. The look of poverty is rendered chic, honorable, and cool. The rich are dressing like the poor, and some experts have commended them for it.[312]

As Givhan describes it, the poor look implies that poverty is a state that can be dabbled with as merely a passing style that may even suggest the wearer is honourable, principled and socially conscious. As a result, those exploring poor looks do so knowingly or ironically. Like Givhan, the author of "The Sponsored Life" Leslie Savan describes dressing poor as a kind of "aesthetic corrective" and notes, "if you can't reform your social attitudes, you can at least reform your look … mixing the inexpensive and the expensive, the old and the new … seems to make you more interesting, mysterious, textured".[313] Today variations on the poor look are widely perceived as proclaiming, if not one's political convictions, then at least a degree of social mobility: "It's a way of showing that you have no boundaries, that whether you're at a party on Park Avenue or in an East Village bar, you can jump into anything, cross over into any kind of group and be accepted".[314] It is an effect mirrored in the art world where critic and artist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe notes that "artworks are valued not because they look good, but because they attempt to demystify the good-looking by showing it to be entangled with corrupt thought".[315] Like those dressing poor, *appearances* –

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[311] Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety* 25.

[312] Robin Givhan 'The Problem With Ugly Chic' in Andrew Ross (ed.) *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers* (New York and London: Verso 1997) 267.

[313] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/fashion/06olsen.html Accessed 3.6.2007.

[314] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/fashion/06olsen.html Accessed 3.6.2007.

[315] Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (New York: Allworth Press 1999) 42.

or rather a lack of appeal to appearances – guide how a person, or a work of art, are judged.

Significantly, in light of Givhan's analysis and indeed the drive of this thesis, what is crucial to the widespread consumption of poor looks is that wearers are smitten with only the *idea* of poverty. While the outcomes and intentions may diverge, both the stoics and the slummers take to pretending, they try on poor looks as a short-term appearance, an experience guided by present and possible future economics. When fashion is no longer driven by only beauty – the polemic posed in the introduction to this thesis, what is really at stake is taste and its relationship to newness. That is, changing tastes and the capacity for multiple tastes to co-exist in light of other aesthetic determinants around the fashion commodity. New garments, new trends, new ideas – that is, new commodities – constantly test and re-test majority taste.

In *The System of Objects* (1968), French philosopher Jean Baudrillard offers a cultural critique of the commodity in consumer society. Baudrillard's semiological analysis of what he calls "marginal" objects – with a focus on antiques and folk art – make sense of our experience of garments that are pre-aged with unfinished hems, holes and tears or which are seen as being outside our own class, for example.

For Baudrillard, consumer items such as antiques and folk art are "outside" present time and therefore have a special function because they signify the passage of time. However, this is not real time, but the rapidly moving time of fashion, rendering them a cultural index of the moment in which they first appeared. They signify historicity, otherness and are anachronistic. They represent transcendence from the fashion system. Thus, when Baudrillard asks, "What is the reason for the strange acculturation phenomenon whereby advanced peoples seek out signs extrinsic to their own time or space, and increasingly remote relative to their own cultural system?" he prompts a

question that is also central to understanding the de-signification of beauty in fashion brought about by the desire to dress poor. [316]

Baudrillard notes that there are two distinctive features of the mythology of the antique object and these are also relevant to thinking about a poor aesthetic in fashion: the nostalgia for origins and the obsession with authenticity. He declares that consumer objects that evoke the past are status symbols, writing, "only workers and peasants still largely shun antiques … the only people who can regress in time are those who can afford it."[317] There is a monetary value at which any functional object gets flattened into the world of signs, accruing the meaning not of its function but of what that function's social value has come to represent. To update Ludwig Wittgenstein, the meaning of an object is not the use or in its appearance, but the price.[318]

The contemporary trend of dressing poor is a mode of dress that seems to embody Baudrillard's deduction when he writes "consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a lack".[319] To update the "trial poverty" endorsed by Seneca, the trend for dressing poor is more theatre than lifestyle. The very ability to consistently consume new fashions indicates an ability to continually partake in the display of wealth, regardless of need. As Lars Svendsen suggests, "Gradually beauty drops out as a central aesthetic norm, and the insistence on something being new becomes the most crucial factor: the logic of fashion has outdone all other aesthetic conditions."[320] Or, as Roland Barthes writes: "Our evaluation of the world no longer depends […] on the opposition between noble and base but on that between Old and New".[321] Thus in light of the comments of both writers, dressing poor is a look that makes the aesthetic conditions of destitution desirable simply because it represents a

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[316] Jean Baudrillard *The System of Objects* (trans. James Benedict) (London: Verso 1996 [1968]) 75.
[317] Baudrillard *The System of Objects* 151.
[318] Joe Scanlan 'Please, Eat the Daises' in Alex Coles, Ed. *DesignArt: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 2007) 64.
[319] Baudrillard *The System of Objects* 205.
[320] Lars Svendsen *Fashion: A Philosophy* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd 2006) 27.
[321] Roland Barthes *The pleasure of the text / Roland Barthes; translated by Richard Miller; with a note on the text by Richard Howard* (New York: Hill and Wan 1975) 40.

widely-accepted, popular style based on one crucial fact: it is new. For those with everything, dressing poor is truly something which they do not possess.

As we have seen in the previous four chapters, ugliness has long been heir to ideas of deliberately quotidian garb, make-do outfitting and politicised dress that value the found, deconstructed and unstable. During historical movements as diverse as the French revolution, World War II and the rise of punk, fashion's other face – an apparent ugliness – has played a key role in reflecting a wearer's desire to publicly display alternative values, whether they be ideals of the state or an individual ethic. Thus, while an apparent ugliness in fashion reflects the desires of the well to do seeking novelty, it may also echo the thinking of minority groups or social anarchists. Dressing poor is a mode that outfits the politicised as a kind of uniform, however, it is also worn by the style conscious keen to keep abreast of the latest movements in fashion, of which dressing poor is but one.[322]

To highlight the ongoing significance of the concept of ugliness in fashion, take a very recent example – the world's largest trade fair in decorative arts and design: the 2009 Milan Salone Internazionale di Mobile. The Salon's central exhibition, entitled Craft Punk, was organized by fashion label Fendi; a company owned by the Italian LVMH, one of the world's richest luxury brands. Craft Punk presented "performances" celebrating unruly experimentation and low-tech design processes. A selection of emerging international designers worked onsite with traditional handcraft methods to create nonconformist, cutting-edge objects, installations and encounters. The word "punk" was used to positively demarcate the edgy and the DIY. The curators used this expression as a description of attitude and spirit; as it suggested fearless defiance in the face of adversity; individuality despite pressure to conform; the drive and inspiration to make something from nothing; finding beauty in things that are imperfect and asserting one's voice despite restricted opportunities.[323]

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[322] Therefore ugliness in fashion might be described as a recurring *zeitgeist* – a spirit of the times that can be continually found and re-found not only within the domain of fashion but also art, architecture, design and theatre, to think only of creative pursuits.

[323] The invited designers were asked to the use of discarded materials from the Fendi production process, such as leather, branded fabrics, plastic decorative elements, and metal hardware and to reinvent the way a process or material is typically employed.

What is key here is the revival of the term punk within the "fringe" exhibition of a major international tradeshow and the significance given to the handmade which is increasingly understood to mean not only skilled, special and unique but edgy, underground and cool. Craft Punk's incorporation is a sign that discarded materials and imperfect edges is no longer an alternative movement but a global phenomenon of use to the marketing arm of a major company promoting themselves within the world's largest design tradeshow. Thus the crafted – a concept also found at work in garments within the wardrobe explored in the thesis from Puma's specially stained motorcycle-inspired collection, to Martin Margiela's mud-dipped shoes to Westwood and McLaren's carefully deconstructed Let It Rock top – is arguably now more mainstream than ever.

Fashion does not exist as a system in isolation, it is a sense-receiving and a sense-producing phenomenon. Indeed, it always exists in relation to other fashions and to the history of fashion, of course. As we saw with Margiela in chapter two, clothing with the lowest exchange value – the soiled and worn for example – are frequently sources of inspiration for the designer, and their transformation is delight for the consumer. Unlike many avant-garde styles from the history of fashion, however, the effects of dressing poor are somewhat predictable in that they have a clearly antagonistic relationship to beauty – one of the traditional drivers of fashion. What we now see is a shift or re-focusing of these traditional drivers. Arguably, beauty is no longer the single most important factor in determining a garment's reception. Instead, novelty itself – new values, shifts in desires, updated strategies of shock – determine fashion's success in the marketplace.

With the middle and upper-classes' renunciation of clothing to the poor because of creases, dirt and holes, we find a connection between dressing poor and real poverty and to particular stylised images of the poor. As Angela McRobbie notes, "second-hand style continually emphasizes its distance from second-hand clothing … avoid[ing] the stigma of poverty, the shame of ill-fitting clothing and

the fear of disease through infestation".[324] Thus, second hand clothes carry negative and unsettling associations of poverty, immigration and displacement. Moreover, old clothes may also be associated with disease and even death. For example, the Panafrican News Agency warned that millions of people might be exposing themselves to serious health problems including scabies, radioactivity, ringworm, skin infections and tuberculosis by wearing second hand clothes without washing them.[325] Again Givhan, writes:

> Ugly has become fashionable. The secondhand, mix-and-match style of the world's poor is now chic. The design industry has found inspiration in the global recycling bin. The clothes that we discard and ship to distant countries are coming back to us. Rich Americans are beginning to dress like poor Africans who are dressing like well-to-do Americans did some twenty or thirty years ago.[326]

While second hand clothes and second hand-styling carry a sense of fear, disgust and even danger – as Givhan outlines – these same features are in turn alluring characteristics for both fashion designers and fashion consumers. For cultural critic Joanne Finkelstein, the creative characteristics of second hand materials arise when designers appropriate the discarded with the aim of substituting the present for the past in order to create an amnesiac effect. Here the aged features of a garment are rewritten by the designer as a new look; "encouraging a rewriting of the past at the very moment when we think we are rescuing it".[327] For Finkelstein, second hand styling does not return the past in a faithful way; rather the style steals from it, transforming nostalgia into a concept driving fashion, and of course profit.[328]

In 2001 Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons created garments that appear to be made of rubbish and discarded safety equipment, like debris resourced from a crash site. The materials were in fact camouflage fabric, black and yellow striped 'danger' barrier tape, red safety floatation tubing, shredded paper and a distorted white and red check print that resonates with warning signs or a

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324 Angela McRobbie (ed.) Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1989) 29, 34.
325 Palmer & Clark (eds.) *Old Clothes, New Looks* 3.
326 Givhan 'The Problem With Ugly Chic' 263.
327 Finkelstein *Slaves of Chic* 120.
328 Finkelstein *Slaves of Chic* 120.

warped version of the chequered pattern of police cars or an ambulance worker's uniform trim. These are clothes for wearing in a crisis. By association, these materials transform the body itself into a site of uncertainty and insecurity while transforming the appearance of recycled waste into an aesthetics of survival.

Others have made trash a feature, also taking on survival and sustainability themes. Drawing again from the wardrobe, Kosuke Tsumura, for example, makes solutions for assisting the homeless the starting point for design, as in his Final Home jacket, 1994, that has been designed to be embedded with screwed up newspaper in order to keep the wearer warm while sleeping on the street.[329] While Tsumura has designed a garment with a real-world application, like many of the other designers discussed here, his garments are still intended for a fashion-conscious audience. Given the cost and the conceptual marketing campaign (Final Home asks purchasers to return the coat after enjoying it for donation to an NGO for the benefit of refugees or disaster victims) we again see irony in aping this particular source of inspiration.

Today the aesthetics of poverty have been translated into a distinct design vocabulary by more conventional fashion labels. Embodying McRobbie's argument that these companies are a post-modern paradox, transforming nostalgia into profit. Australian fashion label, Country Road's advertising campaign promotes its "Oversized Lofty Cardigan", "Cracked leather belt" and "Washed blazer" while American brand J. Crew market their "broken-in tees", coloured with "special dyes and then washed down for that great had-it-for-years softness and fade".[330]

A historical and formal spectrum for ugliness in fashion and its relationship to the concept of dressing poor was defined early in the thesis. As we discovered, poor looks characterize ugliness in fashion and are identified by clothes with holes, tears and stains and which are misshapen or worn out. What is clear upon an analysis and discussion of the work of Thorstein Veblan, Georg Simmel,

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[329] Sandra Ballentine 'The New Collectibles' *The New York Times* February 2005.
[330] See *Country Road Autumn 2005* catalogue (unpaginated) and *J. Crew Women-Spring 2005* catalogue: 40.

Michel Foucault, Caroline Evans and Rebecca Arnold is that ugliness in fashion is an imitation or construction of the signs of wear and tear and other, varying levels of abuse. And herein lies our definition of apparent ugliness as the positive reformation of previously inappropriate, negative and unacceptable features in fashion. Poor looks are based on a representation of, or allusion to, interpretations of poverty and are rarely associated with actual hardship. Thus the ugliness in "ugly fashion", as raised by Robin Givhan, is ersatz: dressing poor is a fashion that says one thing but means another. As a result, poor looks are a signifier of other interconnected and complex codes that relate to conspicuous consumption. It is an act of the leisure class that Veblen describes and its taboo on being productive. For Veblen, showing off one's style through a fashion is equivalent to revealing one's standing through a display of good manners. And like fashion, manners have no lucrative side effects, instead they vouch for a life of leisure, of high standing and an understanding of the techniques of appearance.[331]

Throughout the thesis we have also introduced the idea of ugliness via a number of examples from an imaginary wardrobe to create a visual picture of the look and to begin unpacking the features of this important trend and its variations. To dress poor is to appropriate the actual garb of the working classes or to wear garments that imitate filth or which appear hard-worn. We have seen how "trying on" poor looks is sometimes an attempt at experiencing poverty in order to better understand deprivation and how second hand style carries with it an aura of authenticity through a purposeful lack of ostentation. Indeed, poor looks may even denote an element of politicization to the point where, as one fashion commentator suggests, consumers are not expected to like these clothes because their broader meaning and social understanding is what is paramount.[332]

In its most radical effect, dressing poor pits one human impulse; consumption, against another; preservation. It incorporates utility in the fashion object that is threatened physically. That is, it transforms holes, rips and tears into desirable features. As poor looks reappear throughout time, our desire for beauty and

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[331] Thorstein Veblen *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover Publications Inc [1899] 1994) 69.
[332] Givhan 'The Problem With Ugly Chic' 263.

utility coalesce in such a way as to confuse our motivations, making the appearance of over-use and the destruction of beauty seem at turns both sensible and perverse.[333] The fact remains that we are in the midst of a radical moment in the history of dress with the increasing social tolerance of holes, rips, stains and tears in our clothes. Today, in a large number of workplaces, it is suitable to wear many of the garments explored in this thesis. It tells us that the ready-made hole has become an acceptable decorative effect in the most conservative of sites. Frequently, what is unacceptable or apparently ugly today is legitimate tomorrow and in a suitable context what is ugly on its own, may become beautiful when reformulated in a new and different whole.

We have also asked how poor looks are determined. We looked historically at the major shifts in perception around dress as the mercantile classes grew in the fifteenth century and how new, clean and fresh attire came to represent elegance while older, dirty, decaying clothes came to signal low status and ugliness. As a contemporary style, the mode of ugliness generated by wear and tear (whether real or not) is redeemed by the fashion designer who turns uselessness (holes and tears) into productive designer elements. Of importance too, however, is self-styling – which adds new levels of complexity to understanding the sometimes slippery space around the meaning of holes, stains and tears and demarcating one as fashion and the other not. For example, the overwhelming numbers of people published on blogs such as HelLooks who describe an interest in poor looks reveal that the trend is a strong source of inspiration for young consumer-creators of fashion and those who want to appear unique and individual.

We have closely investigated examples of ugliness in fashion by deconstructing garments by designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren and Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garcons. Here we took the fashion object directly to broaden the analysis of ugliness and explore the importance of not only fashion's materiality but its form, public presentation and public recording. In discussing the poor aesthetic via Westwood and McLaren, in particular, we saw how dressing poor has carried a long history of artistic and political associations

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[333] Scanlan 'Please, Eat the Daises' 63.

and it has stood as a sign of independence and refusal of social mores and standards.[334] For these designers, in particular, the look reflects a social condition where identity itself has become a symbolic garment that can be taken on and off.

Within the thesis we have outlined three broad phases that define the development of the social meaning of dressing poor. First, poor looks are imposed on the majority of the population to enforce hierarchies, then, they are simultaneously enforced but also create an environment of innovation leading to a period when stylised versions of poor looks are desired by both subcultural groups and mainstream fashion consumers. In this final phase, dressing poor is a complex melding of the desires of the purchaser and the producer. The result is a trend that confounds the logic driving traditional consumer choices but which also expresses personal politics. At various moments outside of this schematic outline, dressing poor has been the choice of those undergoing rituals, dabbling in fantasies and denouncing ostentation.[335]

In this thesis we have encountered the seeming indignity of fashion designers' appropriation of the "look" of poverty. In the context of postmodern strategies for making fine art, appropriation is a device that destroys the uniqueness and originality of the artwork through its quotation.[336] With regards to contemporary fashion design, appropriation often leads to a scrambling of the denotative and connotative functions of design features, where, for example, the appearance and meaning of holes, tears, unfinished hems, patches, and recycled garments changes radically in the context of high fashion. For example, garments produced by companies such as Levi's and J. Crew after being cut and sewn, are put through a chemical process to re-dye them and wash them to simulate a worn look.[337] Thus, clothing that can be said to express a poverty aesthetic is almost always new but simply has the look of the old or the

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[334] See Hollander *Seeing Through Clothes* on Chanel's reworking of the 'little black dress' for example.
[335] See Foucault *The Care of the Self*. See also: The Kyoto Costume Institute. Fashion: The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute A History from the 18th to the 20th Century (Köln: Taschen 2002).
[336] See Rex Butler *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 90s* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art 1996).
[337] Bradley Quinn *Techno Fashion* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002) 134.

appearance of being despoiled.

The poor aesthetic in dress restates the existence of poverty and usurps it, repeats it and takes its place. In many ways, dressing poor raises a philosophical and moral question over appropriation and how designers imagine fashion consumers' difference from those who are poor and disenfranchised. A poor aesthetic does not represent poverty so much as it represents ideas or cultural stereotypes about a certain kind of poverty. While the op shop – or its precursors of market stalls and second hand boutiques and its antecedent, ebay – has been excavated for a redefinition of past aesthetic values, the op shop is also scavenged for any shred of anti-aesthetic ethics.[338] That is, today in the twenty-first century, consumers may actually be conscious of wearing their clothes until the moment just before holes and tears appear and are concerned to not be seen discarding clothes for purely fickle reasons. "As a society we have gone too far in the direction of ostentation", a spokesperson for the fashion industry Doneger Group said, mixing one or two expensive pieces in a wardrobe otherwise straight out of "Les Misérables" is an indication, he added, that "we want to begin withdrawing from luxury, but we are still addicted to it, searching for a way to hang on while we try to kick the habit."[339] Indeed, as the thesis shows, we take pleasure in dressing-up in the discarded excess of others. But, as fashion historian Elizabeth Wilson writes "the poor seldom go in rags – they wear cheap versions of the fashions that went out a few years ago".[340] In other words, dressing poor is invariably a stereotype of the way that poverty is imagined by the majority middle classes. As artist Philip Brophy describes,

> Remember what an op shop is: the opportunity for the disenfranchised to obtain contemporary possessions at less-than market value. The real op shopper is independently poor, living in the shadows cast by use-by dates: he or she would rather have you believe they shopped at Target.[341]

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[338] Evans 'The Golden Dustman" 83.
[339] http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/fashion/06olsen.html Accessed 4.6.08.
[340] Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 3
[341] Philip Brophy 'Op Shop Culture: Aesthetics In Mothballs' *Like* No.1 Melbourne 1996 [online version]

Those who struggle financially are always outside fashion, as Brophy reminds us. In reality, the bulk of the poor in the West, in particular, are more likely to be found in a style of dress characterised by inferior design and quality rather than by a state of ruination. However, the poor and even the destitute have been drawn into fashion as a source of inspiration.

Throughout this thesis we have encountered the recurring themes of fashion and its connection to the formation of social status and conspicuous consumption, morality, nostalgia, the avant-garde, dressing as symbolic resistance and playful self-parody. The poverty aesthetic in high fashion raises issues of taste, identity, economics, class and the role of fashion in maintaining the status quo. The thesis has incorporated both historical and contemporary examples to plot an outline for the development of dressing poor, building toward a dynamic "picture" of this look. This outline has also traced some of the ideas around the meaning of dressing poor during relevant moments in fashion history and these have become focused examples. The thesis has drawn on evidence from a wide field with each chapter growing the evidence of the previous one while opening up room for the following, like the construction of a quilt. The finished work shows a synthesis of broad research concerns.

There is more work to be done in this field and more than is able to be covered within the boundaries of this thesis. For example, a detailed map to historically and theoretically understand the poor aesthetic would assist us in highlighting the significance of this movement in fashion more fully. This more thorough guide would reflect a highly detailed network of intersecting and overlapping trajectories and would further incorporate designer products, interior and industrial design, film and fashion photography which are all examples of creative endeavors that have at times explored a poor aesthetic. Further study into the role of poor looks in more sociological terms would also yield important societal and cultural roots and our understanding of related fields such as aesthetics, consumption and social mores.[342]

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[342] While a poverty aesthetic has informed creative practice in areas such as Poor Theatre and the work of Jerzy Grotowski; Poor Cinema, with Lars van Trier's Dogma films a key example; and Poor Craft, as explored by Australian writer and curator Kevin Murray in his book and exhibition *Make the Common Precious*, the central concerns of this thesis pivot around one key

Through writers such as Umberto Eco, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Caroline Evans and Rebecca Arnold, we have come to see ugliness not in opposition to beauty, but as its other face. We have learnt that we should understand the appearance of dressing poor as coming to understand universal order. As Eco writes:

> the created universe is a whole that is to be appreciated in its entirety, where the contribution of shadows is to make the light shine out all the more, and even that which can be considered ugly in itself appears beautiful within the framework of the general Order.[343]

Thus, as Eco shows, we can enjoy the beauty of ugliness in dressing poor without hypocrisy. Here the designer can be the producer and the judge of a reconfigured beauty within a new system and hierarchy of aesthetics. Ugliness is not simply the absence of form or the representation of asymmetry, disharmony, disfigurement or deformation – the opposite of beauty which is instead understood as reflecting balance and integrity. Rather, ugliness must be present in order for us to recognise beauty as it highlights beauty's special qualities. Most significantly, the thesis draws out the idea that within ugliness itself we will find positive attributes. At a time when the gloss of beauty has begun to fade into distrustful notions of ostentation, relentless novelty and the ersatz; ugliness, on the other hand, has become a sign of authenticity, humbleness and even intelligence.

At the beginning of the thesis we asked two key questions, "What happens when modern fashion is no longer driven only by beauty?" and, "in a thesis exploring fashion and ugliness, what is fashion?". So, we return to the same point at which we began. These lines of enquiry help, within the bounds of this thesis, to define the kinds of questions we need to ask of dressing poor in order to better understand its meaning. Brophy questions art's desire for the derelict and the ensuing effects in a way that is significant for the writing of fashion's interest in a poor aesthetic. He outlines it this way:

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drive: exploring the idea of dressing poor as it relates to the concept of ugliness and its special significance in relation to contemporary fashion.
[343] Umberto Eco *History of Beauty* 148.

> I can't help whingeing about art's innate inability to deal with the
> everyday, the trashy, the ephemeral, the transient, the lost, the abused,
> the crappy, the dismissible, the forgotten, the murky, the mass, the
> stupid, the fucked-up, the bland, the empty, etc. without either (a)
> dwelling on and languishing in a poetic sensation of these aspects; (b)
> rendering these aspects hyper-sterile by scrutinizing them under the
> track lights of the gallery-void; or (c) being plain ignorant of the broader
> and more fertile references which the contents of the installations
> establish. It could be that despite all the great work produced within the
> post-Pop continuum collectively says: there's a world outside my practice
> and I have no way to deal with it and I'm real fucked-up about it.[344]

Brophy's "whinge", as he describes it, with the art world's interest in the trashy and his own uncertain position on its effects are useful for our investigation. Brophy raises the effects of art's interest in ugliness as "poetic sensation" on the one hand and the "hyper-sterile" on the other once in the context of the gallery. In broaching this dichotomy, Brophy raises the same concerns at work in this thesis. Arguably we can substitute these ideas with the fetishization of the rip or stain and the making sterile of the potential radical side to these elements by giving them high prices, inserting designer labels and by drawing them into the context of the boutique.

Perhaps "getting dressed" in the modern world will always be an aesthetics of poverty of sorts – as it will always be a matter of bricolage – a coming together of garments that are "found" by the wearer who constructs a wardrobe over time.[345] Ironically, Veblen himself might be thought of as a participant in dressing poor. According to his biographer, Joseph Dorfman, "the clothes [Veblen] wore at home were so coarse they would almost stand alone. The heaviest of work-shoes purchased from Sears Roebuck, served him for everyday wear in the house". Finally, writes Dorfman, Veblen bought much from the mail order houses, "because he liked the rugged utility of the goods".[346] Thus even our sociological theorist of clean and tidy appearances finds something of value in simplicity and avoiding luxury.

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344 Brophy 'Op Shop Culture: Aesthetics In Mothballs'.
345 Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* 3.
346 Carter *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes* 54.

Plato believed that the only reality was that of the world of ideas, of which our material world is a shadow and imitation. For him, ugliness should thus be identified with non-being, given that in the *Parmenides* he rejects the existence of ideas of foul or base things such as stains, mud or hairs. Ugliness exists, therefore, only in the sensible order, as an aspect of the imperfection of the physical universe compared to the ideal world.[347] In light of this, ugliness might be said to remind us that we are part of a complex and real world. Indeed, it is this habit of thinking that designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, Martin Margiela and Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garcons continually attempt to not be constrained by. They seem to be seeking a more demanding view of beauty and they reject the idea that they must always remain in complete control of the materials that compose a garment.

While avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century such as Sonia Delaunay attempted to reject "official" fashion, refusing its mercantile logic and striving to replace it with a utopian "anti-fashion", many of today's designers exploring ugliness have found a mode in which to straddle both worlds successfully – they create highly conceptual and marketable garments with a business savvy eye. They have not only produced misshapen clothes with holes, tears and stains, they have critically and financially profited from these designs. Indeed they bring great worth to the so-called worthless and retain an aura around their brand by dematerializing the aura around their garments. Here ugliness grants fashion a peculiarity that reconstitutes garments as a new experience – outside the mainstream of fashion – that validates instead of disqualifying.

We have seen that much of the power of ugliness resides in the fact that it represents a lack of beauty. Ugliness is not beauty's other but rather its shadow or phantom. And in fashion, as it has been shown through the carefully selected garments within this imaginary wardrobe, ugliness represents the collapse of one set of illusions and the construction of another. The significance of exploring ugliness in fashion is that once identified we are able to investigate the meaning of the absence of glamour in fashion. We realize how much of a garment's displaced beauty actually lay only on its surface. The appearance of

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[347] Eco *On Ugliness* 24.

ugliness in fashion suggests that there is more to be discovered, that a garment's other layers contain rich and dynamic meaning. This thesis argues that it is precisely fashion's special character that allows it to maintain an uncertainty around such core drivers as beauty. Thus, as we close the wardrobe door, the seemingly indefatigable interest in ugliness triggers a dialectic that not only challenges the traditionally central role of beauty in fashion but may even shift us toward a new concept of what fashion is or can be.

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