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Is Fashion Art?

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Fashion as a category of discourse has been attracting scholars' attention since the late nineteenth century. In many prominent studies, researchers have focused on various social, psychological, and economic theories of fashion. Topics addressed include costume history, behavioral research, and fashion merchandising, together with marketing and advertising. They often examine the forces and historical contexts driving fashion phenomena to find out what satisfaction people derive from their obedience to fashion, why this satisfaction compensates for physical and economic sacrifice, and how fashionable clothing can be transformed into profitable commodities.

What has been most notably overlooked in fashion research, however, is arguably fashion's most important feature, namely, "the aesthetic."

As the art historian Anne Hollander has pointed out, the essential aspect of clothing is its visual impact and "all other considerations are occasional and conditional" (Hollander 1978: 311). Agreeing with Hollander's notion, the sociologist Elizabeth Wilson has also emphasized that we should see fashion as "a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visible self as its medium" (Wilson 1987: 9). Moreover, George B. Sproles, the well-known behavioral scientist, has asserted the following: "The approaches of the aesthetician are easily overlooked when analyzing fashion, since aesthetics is thought of as the study of art, not fashion. This is a serious oversight, for fashions are aesthetic products and any theory of fashion will necessarily include aesthetic components" (Sproles 1985: 63).

The lack of research on the aesthetics of fashion raises the controversial question of whether fashion can be considered art, a question that has emerged most significantly in the early 1980s. This controversy was sparked in 1983 when Yves Saint Laurent's 25-year retrospective exhibition opened at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; until then, conventional exhibitions at museums were primarily reserved for artworks or historic costumes, rather than for current fashions.

After Saint Laurent's groundbreaking exhibition, other museums began to follow suit and mounted exhibitions dealing with art and fashion. The most notable examples were "Fashion and Surrealism" at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) gallery in 1987 and "Infra-Apparel" at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1991, both of which presented fashion in an artistic context. In the same vein, this tendency could be seen in exhibitions, such as "Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Clothing Design," held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1982); Roberto Capucci's exhibition "Sculptures in Fabric," at the Venice Biennale (1995); and the "Art-to-Wear Exhibition," held as part of the Kwangju Biennale in South Korea (1995).

Owing to these prominent exhibitions and their increasing emphasis on fashion's aesthetic aspects, I find it problematic that theoretical arguments or criticism within the fashion world seem limited in number and scope compared with the other arts. Focusing on the visual qualities of fashion raises the following questions: Do fashion and art share underlying values and concepts? What kind of common ground exists between the fashion world and the visual art world? What are the differences between them? With these questions in mind, I would like to initiate the development of a critical approach to fashion by arguing the relationship between fashion and art. In addition, I will analyze critical fashion writings published in art magazines between 1980 and 1995 to identify and describe the critics' underlying concepts of fashion and to set out the development of a theory of fashion criticism as a domain of aesthetic inquiry. If we agree that aesthetic criticism can be

defined as "informed and organized talk about art" (Feldman 1973), then this study may indeed serve as a foundation for an informed and organized discussion of aesthetic criticism of fashion.

Is Fashion Art?

In the fashion and art worlds, confusion as to whether fashion is art has almost always existed, and has prompted much debate. As early as 1959, Remy G. Saisselin, a strong proponent of fashion's aesthetic nature, asserted that fashion is indeed art as part of his exploration of the relationship between fashion and poetry in his article "From Baudelaire to Christian Dior: The Poetics of Fashion" (Saisselin 1959). Saisselin, a scholar of eighteenth-century French art, argued that fashion can have metaphysical overtones and aesthetic considerations, and he compared poets' descriptions of fashion with fashion designer Christian Dior's memoirs, citing Baudelaire's definitions of fashion and dress. Although Saisselin does not deal directly with fashion and the visual arts, his work is of tremendous importance, since it is unusual to find a fashion article in academic art journals; in fact, Saisselin was one of the first artworld figures to approach fashion as art.

Sparked by Saisselin's consideration of the fashion–art relationship, the question "Is fashion art?" began to appear explicitly in visual arts magazines and in major fashion exhibitions at many museums and art centers in the early 1980s. The art critic Lori Simmons Zelenko conducted an interview with Diana Vreeland, "Is Fashion Art?" (Zelenko 1981), and, as one of the first explicit articles on this topic in a visual arts magazine, Zelenko's interview marks a turning-point in the history of writings on fashion, since it reveals the confusion surrounding the relationship between fashion and art. In the article, Vreeland, past editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* and former special consultant to the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, firmly insists that "fashion is not art": "Art has to do with something totally *spirituelle* [*sic*]. It is a very remarkable, extraordinary thing. That is what art is and fashion isn't. Fashion has to do with daily life . . . Fashion has a physical vitality, while the vitality of art is not so tangible . . . (Zelenko 1981: 88). Vreeland also defines fashion as "the whim of the public" and as "ornamentation for the human body," which "involves craftsmanship"; she holds the view that "art often inspires fashion, when designers search for the creative impulse." In reference to her exhibition, "The Manchu Dragon: Costumes of China, the Ch'ing Dynasty," mounted at the Costume Institute, Vreeland states that "its extraordinary coloring, enormous luxury, and total simplicity of design are a sense of leisure, which we do not have today." She then predicts that "luxury will return" and explains luxury as "a form of thinking, a form of education towards a goal . . . [To] achieve it, knowledge of all the

ingredients of the social world, of the different periods of art and literature is necessary." "Art is a luxury, but could it become a commodity?" asks the interviewer at one point. Instead of answering directly, Vreeland states that "I do think art is a continual inspiration." According to Zelenko, Vreeland seems hesitant in explaining that "when it [art] comes to the trading-in-and-out, I don't know enough to make an accurate prediction. I do hope it doesn't become like soybeans and get traded on the exchange, but . . . nothing great ever has" (Zelenko 1981: 12).

From the preceding conversation, it may be concluded that Vreeland seeks to maintain a distinction between art and fashion according to her understanding of the two realms. This same distinction might prove unacceptable today, since conceptions of art have changed drastically since the 1980s under the influence of postmodernism. Nevertheless, this interview represents a starting-point for the explicit discussion of fashion and art's controversial relationship.

More recently, the art critic Michael Boodro has dealt with the relationship between fashion and art in his article, "Art and Fashion." He, too, denies that fashion is art: "Art is art and fashion is an industry . . . There is a longstanding, genteel tradition—an ideal, at least—that art is the creation of individuals burning bright with lofty inspiration, that art is above commerce, that art, for its own sake or for any other reason, is the big, important thing . . . Fashion is not art. Fashion is frivolous and unimportant . . ." (Boodro 1990: 120–3). Boodro's distinction between art and fashion is based primarily on fashion's commercial nature. He declares that "never the twain shall meet," although he does acknowledge that "the association between them is a long one and is only growing more intense" (Boodro 1990: 122).

Boodro also mentions strong links between art and fashion, citing painters' depictions of elaborate clothing as found in medieval manuscripts; clothing designed by artists such as Gustav Klimt; and appropriations of designers' artworks, together with designers' utilization of artists and the art scene to provide cachet for their businesses, as in the case of Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo. (Kawakubo used photographs of painters, such as Francesco Clemente and Peter Halley, and photographers Doug and Mike Starn, for her Comme des Garçons advertisement.) Boodro considers the connection between art and fashion to be more complex than "mere thievery and inspiration" (Boodro 1990: 122–3).

Boodro also admits that "the inspiration and motivations of both artists and clothing designers can be strikingly similar," recognizing that "fashion proved that it too could appropriate its own past—not only mocking a classic but showing its continuing versatility and relevance," as is the case with certain visual artists, including Sherrie Levine, Mike Bidlo and Richard Prince. When Boodro considers fashion's changing

role in art, he regards the end of the nineteenth century, with the invention of photography and the rise of Impressionism, to be a critical turning-point. Given the Impressionists' "radical concern with everyday events of the middle class," the clothes they depicted became "not so different from the viewer's own" and encouraged the viewer to consider art as "no longer a rarefied, removed, or spiritual pursuit." Moreover, photographs' ease of duplication transformed fashion into a universal experience (Boodro 1990: 124).

According to Boodro's accounts, artists, especially avant-garde ones, including the Bauhaus, the Wiener Werkstätte, the Russian Constructivists, and the Surrealists, are themselves involved in creating fashion because of their growing dissatisfaction with contemporary fashions. Of those groups, Boodro believes that the Surrealists established the strongest connection between art and fashion. For example, Elsa Schiaparelli, the well-known fashion designer, created outrageous fashions in collaboration with the Surrealists, and, as Boodro notes, "Surrealists themselves were frequent contributors to fashion magazines and continued to use the imagery of their art in fashion items and accessories" (Boodro 1990: 125–6). Recent artists have also been involved in fashion: Keith Haring sold clothing bearing reproductions of his paintings in his Pop Shop in SoHo; artists such as David Salle, Red Grooms and Jean Michel Basquiat created backdrops for a series of fashion spreads in 1983; and the painter Julian Schnabel designed Azzedine Alaïa's fashion boutique in New York. Conversely, designers have established connections in the artworld by using artists' works on their designs, as in the case of Yves Saint Laurent's "Mondrian" dress, unveiled in 1965.

Boodro summarizes the relationship between fashion and art as follows:

> With fashion and art both becoming more pervasive elements of contemporary life, it is inevitable that they will continue to cross over each other's boundaries . . . Though the connection has grown close, there are still inevitable differences between the two. Art is typically private, the creation of an individual. Fashion is public, a collaboration between designer, manufacturer, and wearer and then between wearer and viewer. Art requires time, contemplation, and thought. Fashion is instantaneous . . . (Boodro 1990: 127).

Although Boodro mentions the similarities and close links between fashion and art throughout history and acknowledges that "fashion becomes our creative outlet," he does conclude that fashion is not art: "[Art] is eternal while fashion designs are . . . ephemeral" (Boodro 1990: 127). Boodro's main point is that there is an inevitable distinction between art and fashion despite their common ground. His belief that

fashion is not art seems quite similar to Vreeland's view (that is, fashion is seen in terms of commodity and utility, whereas art is created for its own sake, often with a spiritual focus).

However, Roberta Smith, a regular contributor of art criticism to *The New York Times,* expresses a divergent opinion from Vreeland's and Boodro's in her recent *Vogue* article on the relationship between contemporary art and fashion. That an art critic should be published in a popular fashion magazine suggests a substantial shift away from the dichotomous hierarchical view of the fashion–art relationship. Smith contends that art and fashion became a "hot couple" after fashion gained symbolic meaning in the popular imagination through the fusion of money, youth, and beauty in the 1980s (Smith 1996: 164). The artworld has been attracted to fashion in the same way as it has been preoccupied with popular culture and artists, especially Pop artists, including Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, who were inspired by elements of popular culture, such as jazz, comics, and the movies. Furthermore, Smith argues that current artists, including the young Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury, directly incorporate the glamour of designer goods in their works to parody material excess and to form a contrast with the politically correct, austere art of the early 1990s (Smith 1996: 165).

This tendency appears to have started in the early 1980s in photographs that were considered "critiques" or parodies of fashion photographs and thus of consumer society. Richard Prince, for instance, appropriates fashion spreads and advertisements, exposing the medium's often staid stylistic conventions and narrow definitions of beauty. Cindy Sherman began her "Fashion" series in 1983, photographing herself in clothes by Jean-Paul Gaultier, Issey Miyake, and Jean-Charles de Castelbajac, and went on to create a series of announcement cards for Comme des Garçons in 1994. These phenomena bear witness to a paradigm shift in the relationship between art and fashion.

As is shown in the above examples, fashion nowadays provides artists with subjects or media in addition to fostering their inspiration. Smith further states that the pursuit of fashion's newness is also a basic premise of both modern and postmodern art: "[Fashion] is, in other words, an artworld that operates like clockwork, maintaining the myths of newness, breakthroughs, and constant change so basic to both the modernist and postmodernist enterprise" (Smith 1996: 184). As one may deduce from Smith's title ("Art after a Fashion"), fashion constitutes an influential source for art; indeed, the artworld can no longer ignore fashion. It is very important to note that Smith, as an art critic, explicitly acknowledges that it is no longer true that art, unlike fashion, is eternal and without change, and that fashion gets its inspiration from art rather than the other way around. Indeed, fashion as a form of art is a real inspiration to the larger artworld. In this sense, Smith's notion of fashion and art is highly significant and represents a striking turn-around with respect to past thinking on the fashion–art relationship.

To take a more recent example, the opinion expressed by Richard Martin, former editor of *Arts Magazine*, past director of the FIT Galleries and currently curator of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, stands in stark contrast to Boodro's and Vreeland's perspectives. Darryl Turner's interview with Martin, "Couture de Force" (Turner 1996), is a very important source, since it raises many controversial issues about the interrelationship of fashion and art, the criteria for determining great designers, the appearance of fashions in museums, and the appropriation of art by fashion. When Turner asks Martin how fashion came to be his primary focus, Martin provides the following explanation: "I lost my way, ended up losing art and gaining fashion; it was a seamless thing for me. But I don't consider myself outside of art. I've probably never made a sufficient distinction between the two" (Turner 1996: 15). For Martin, there is no real difference between fashion and art; he is interested in fashion because he believes that fashion is the most appropriate form for "art and issues of body and gender." Although Martin acknowledges that the artworld is still wary of commerce, he does make his positive views known: "I will say that one of the good things about fashion is that its commerce is blatant. The art world generally likes to be very discreet about commerce. Fashion is about manifestation—it's always out in the open" (Turner 1996: 16).

Martin considers fashion's commercial aspects to be a distinct advantage, although the artworld generally dislikes this side of fashion. He believes that owing to this inherent advantage, the public has more interest in and knowledge about fashion than it does about art. Martin's thoughts on the art–fashion relationship thus conflict with Vreeland's and Boodro's contention that art has to do with something totally spiritual, whereas fashion reflects daily life or utilitarian commodity. He also notes that fashion's involvement in past developments in art history is one of the underlying reasons why certain fashion houses are drawing so much attention today. He explains that Prada and Gucci are the hot houses of the moment because "they are presenting a minimalism that has historical resonance, which is about sneaking in a lot of luxury under minimalism." Martin's criteria for great fashion designers also parallel criteria for great artists. He believes that "the great designers [like Balenciaga] really let the cloth speak—in the same way that Morris Louis lets the paint speak." He appreciates the ability of designers to take artistic advantage of their creative media's naturally expressive properties.

Martin also deals with the issue of fashion designers' appropriation of art. Although he acknowledges that there are cases of fashion simply copying art, he suggests that some cases may be considered to have the same sensibilities as art, as when the designer finds a moment in time to accommodate an artwork. For example, in Yves Saint Laurent's Mondrian dress, the designer ingeniously made people think of the dress in terms of planar clothing by utilizing Mondrian as a kind of paradigm

for the flatness that prevailed in that era. Martin notes that Saint Laurent "selected his art as judiciously, knowledgeably, and respectfully as any of the '80s appropriationist arts," while accommodating its core concept into fashion's whimsy of the body. He adds that "[designer Rei Kawakubo's brand] Comme des Garçons was really one of the cross-over sensibilities between the art and fashion worlds" (Turner 1996: 116). Martin reveals that today's fashion criteria are based on concepts of visual art; the making and evaluating of fashion are thus similar to artistic processes. From the same perspective, the thesis of Martin's article, "A Case for Fashion Criticism" (Martin 1987) serves as a cornerstone for the notion of fashion as art. Here, Martin examines conventional distinctions between art and fashion and concludes that the lack of fashion criticism is due to an unwillingness to view fashion as art.

Although today's society takes fashion more seriously than ever before, there is still a prevailing climate of doubt that discourages serious analysis of fashion. However, as we have seen, it is now possible to draw the conclusion that fashion, like any other artistic endeavor, is a worthy component of the aesthetic domain. There is no doubt that fashion is a substantive socio-cultural and aesthetic phenomenon. Therefore, I believe that fashion criticism must be developed, not on behalf of pseudo-intellectualism, but on the basis of shared substantial knowledge of fashion as a domain of aesthetic inquiry.

Grounding Aesthetic Criticism of Fashion

There have been some writings (sometimes in the name of journalism) devoted to fashion criticism in the artworld. In tandem with post-modernism, the recognition of fashion's aesthetic aspects began to appear in the early 1980s in the visual arts community. With this recognition, those in the art press began to publish articles on fashion, and they continue to demonstrate their concern for fashion as art in their publications. These writings have not, however, been analyzed to reveal their critical stances on fashion. My strategy is to develop the foundation for a theory of fashion criticism through examining and uncovering the writer's criteria and underlying conceptions of fashion writings in American art magazines, including *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Artnews*, and *Arts Magazine*, published primarily between 1980 and 1995.

For this purpose, thirty-two fashion writings selected as potential critical writings were analyzed (see Table 1). Each article was examined preliminarily as a source of raw data according to the seven elements of art criticism constituting James D. Carney's "Style-relative Model of Art Criticism" (Carney 1991b: 15–22) to provide a basis for the overall analysis. Although Carney's model was developed for visual art criticism (primarily paintings) it is also suitable for identifying critics' stances

regarding fashion in the visual arts communities. This model is also appropriate for a postmodern assessment of fashion writings, since it dovetails with postmodern theories by acknowledging the relative values of artworks according to different styles within the continuum of art history, instead of assigning a single dogmatic and formalistic value without historical reference.

The late twentieth century has witnessed a tremendous shift from a formal emphasis on art to a broader social and historical view. To accommodate such changes in perspectives in the artworld, Carney, as an aesthetician, developed the historical/style theory of art, acknowledging the importance of painting's stylistic characteristics in the context of art history. Influenced by the aesthetician Arthur Danto's notion of "artworld," Carney writes:

> When we interpret a painting, we, in a sense, read into the work things that are not there. Figuring out a picture's content, what the painting may represent, express, and exemplify, and what may be its thematic features, involves more than perceiving the possessed features of the paintings. It presupposes some knowledge about the work's place in art history. Such things as subject matter and form of a particular painting can be determined once we have grasped the stylistical characteristics (Carney 1991a: 15).

Just as Danto points out that "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry [sic]—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (Danto 1987: 162), so too Carney asserts that the interpretation of paintings depends on invisible as well as visible formal properties. Carney contends that what is essential to an artwork is an appropriate relation to previous artworks; new objects are thus identified as art through art history rather than through art theories (Carney 1991b: 272). Since most of the objects have been classified by art historians in terms of general styles with a degree of objectivity, an object can be considered to be an artwork if it can be linked to a past or present general style or styles exhibited by prior artworks.

Carney's theory of art is compatible with the open disjunctive concept of art (whereby a family resemblance is sought within the context of art history) since he acknowledges a variety of different ways to recognize artworks. In arguing that an object is art, Carney's logical premise seems to be based on the linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical model of *family resemblance* and the aesthetician Morris Weitz's notion of *art as an open concept*. To answer traditional questions of relationship, Wittgenstein uses the analogy of games, stating that among games "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities

Table 1 General Information on Selected Critical Fashion Writings

	Article	Date/Source	Author's Name/Position	Topic
1.	The Tens, The Twenties, The Thirties	Mar. '74:40–43/*Arts*	Blair Sabol/Journalist	Exhibition
2.	Vanity Fair	May '78:23/*Arts*	Ronny H. Cohen/Critic	Exhibition
3.	Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Clothing Design	Nov. '82:78:80/*Artf*	Richard Flood/Editor	Exhibition
4.	Beyond Fashion: Mariano Fortuny	Nov. '82:25–9/*Arti*	Judith Shea/Sculptor	Exhibition
5.	Fashion Shapes by James	May '83:53–5/*Arti*	Lawrence Campbell /Painter	Exhibition
6.	East Village	Sep. '86:146–7/*Arti*	Deborah Drier/Editor	Exhibition
7.	Designing Women	May '87:21–3/*Arti*	Deborah Drier/Editor	Exhibition
8.	Obsession	Feb.'88:110–17,61/*Arti*	Deborah Drier/Editor	Exhibition
9.	Fashion and Surrealism	Apr.'88:136/*Artn*	Eleanor Heartney/Critic	Exhibition
10.	Le Théâtre de la Mode	Sum.'91:18–19/*Artf*	Valerie Steele/Scholar	Exhibition
11.	Classical Gravity	Oct.'92:18/*Artn*	Penny Proddow/ Jewelry Historian	Exhibition
12.	Anarchy in the V & A	Feb.'95:29–30 /*Artf*	Jon Savage/Journalist	Exhibition
13.	Suited for Leisure	Mar. '95:19/*Artf*	Hilton Als/Journalist	Exhibition
14.	Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo and Exotic Classicism in Twentieth-Century Design	Apr. '81:102–3/*Arts*	Philip Smith/Painter	Designer
15.	Turned Out	Oct. '85:8/*Artf*	William Wilson/Critic	Designer
16.	The Defiant Ones	Sep.'87:47,49,51/*Arti*	Deborah Drier/Editor	Designer
17.	Aesthetic Dress: The Art of Rei Kawakubo	Mar.'87:64–5/*Arts*	Richard Martin/Critic	Designer
18.	The Chanel Superego	Nov. '92:5–6/*Artf*	Rhonda Lieberman/Critic	Designer
19.	Before and After Fashion	Mar. '95:74–7/*Artf*	Olivier Zahm/Editor	Designer
20.	Easy As A.P.C.	Sum.'95:15–16,123/*Artf.*	Olivier Zahm/Editor	Designer

	Article	Date/Source	Author's Name/Position	Topic
21.	Perfectly Awful	Oct.'95:70–3/*Artf*	Hilton Als/Journalist	Designer
22.	Gianni Versace	Oct.'95:75/*Artf*	Richard Martin/Critic	Designer
23.	Icon at Large	Nov.'86:8–9/*Artf*	Lisa Lieberman/Critic	Trend
24.	Fashion and Anti-Fashion	Jan.'88:52–3/*Arts*	Richard Martin/Critic	Trend
25.	Retro Fashion	Dec.'90:24/*Artf*	Valerie Steele/Scholar	Trend
26.	Tribalism in Effect	Nov.'91:22–4/*Artf*	Andrew Ross/Scholar	Trend
27.	Secret Vices: Bad-Girl Boots	Mar.'92:13–14/*Artf*	Manohla Dargis /Journalist	Trend
28.	Springtime for Grunge	Apr.'93:8–10/*Artf*	Rhonda Lieberman/Critic	Trend
29.	Shiny Happy People	Sum.'94:12–13/*Artf*	Hilton Als/Journalist	Trend
30.	Say Chic	Dec.'95:26–7/*Artf*	Richard Martin/Critic	Trend
31.	Sequined Simulacra	July '88:51–3/*Arti*	Amy Fine Collins/Critic	Collection
32.	Survival of the Fitted	May'95:9–10/*Artf*	Rhonda Lieberman/Critic	Collection

Note: Arts: Arts Magazine; *Artf*: Art Forum; *Arti*: Art in America; *Artn*: Artnews.

of detail" (Wittgenstein 1968: 31). He concludes that it is not necessary to seek universal commonality in constituting a family of games, but rather to seek certain similarities, namely, family resemblances. Morris Weitz takes Wittgenstein's concept and applies it to art, while suggesting that in art there are also only family resemblances and that there is no particular criterion for defining art (Weitz 1956: 33). Carney's theory of art is clearly influenced by Weitz's concept; however, Carney modifies the emptiness of Weitz's controversial open concept by including the notion of art history and recognizing the common non-exhibited properties in the artworld, on the basis of Arthur Danto's assertion. Carney's theory of art is supported by the fact that not all historical theories of art assume that there is any single ingredient which identifies a work; rather, they always assume a relationship of one kind or another (Mandelbaum 1965: 219–28). Carney uses the term "arthood" instead of "family resemblance," to describe this relationship. In Carney's historical/style theory of art, the arthood achieved by the linkage to general style is the most important condition for an object to be considered an artwork. Therefore, if this condition is satisfied, certain works can be inserted as artworks into certain periods of art history.

Based on the preceding historical/style theory of art, Carney's "Style-relative Model of Art Criticism" was developed to encompass the postmodern artworld. The model consists of seven key elements: Locate the Style, Descriptive Features and Structures, Primary Aesthetic Features, Value Features, Low-level Interpretation, High-level Interpretation, and Critical Judgment (Carney 1994).

In "Locate the Style," critics present the artistic and historical characteristics of artworks in order to facilitate classifying artworks into any general style categories (for example, as a forerunner of Expressionism, Surrealism, etc.). In Carney's model, a correct style location is the most important foundation of art criticism, since it also generates value features that lead to critical judgments.

Critics ostensibly list the "descriptive features and structures" of artworks. Carney uses this phrase to designate the physical characteristics of the artwork, including the actual colors, shapes, forms, arrangements, and textures (for instance, low-keyed tonality, thick layering, crude draftsmanship, bold form, etc.). Although there are limitless descriptive features and structures, the artwork's style provides the guidelines as to which features or structures are salient.

Critics also list the "primary aesthetic features," conveniently classified as representational, expressive, and exemplified. These classifications take into account objects' structures, together with various extrinsic stylistic properties. In formalist criticism these features represent art's value features for critical judgment.

Critics go on to list the "value features," which form the basis for the aesthetic judgment of an artwork. In Carney's view, the important features for critical judgment are the value features (that is, the ideals of the style) that are generated from the classification of the individual art style in the light of styles of schools or movements throughout art history. Such value features extend far beyond formal features, because mere visual pleasure does not provide an adequate account of aesthetic value. Since Carney contends that an artwork's value derives from the work's individuality within art history, an artwork's style generates what are to be taken as the appropriate kinds of value features. Style and the goals of a style both generate and limit the set of appropriate kinds of value features. Value features may also play a role in reducing critics' reliance on personal taste and subjectivity in judging when an artwork has a value feature.

Critics then provide the "low-level interpretation" of artworks. According to Carney, the low-level interpretation is little more than an account of visible subject-matter based on the earlier steps, especially as regards the primary aesthetic features. On this level a plurality of elements may be selected, but there is little room for debate.

Through "high-level interpretation," critics identify significant art content bearing current values to bring together what is reportable in low-level interpretations, such as the artist's *œuvre*, declarations made

by the artist, and the function of the artwork in a historical context. Therefore, high-level interpretation maximizes the aesthetic value of the artwork for the contemporary audience and provides the interpretation of the aesthetic value of the artwork. Especially in the postmodern era, high-level interpretation based on the cultural function of the artworks becomes more important, since artworks are valued as cultural agents of social, political, and ideological change. The ideal of high-level interpretation also explains the reasons underlying the critical judgment.

A "critical judgment" is primarily based on value features expressed in the high-level interpretation. A critic can judge that an artwork has (or lacks) aesthetic value to some degree, or that one artwork has more (or less) value than another, when reasons are directed to the value features found in the interpretation. In this model, Carney explains that the judgment can be implicitly expressed by assigning it a rank in relation to other works in a given style. If a particular work is an effective instance of the value features of the style, it is then judged positively.

The selected writings were analyzed using Carney's model to determine whether the authors of critical fashion writings in art magazines show methods and conceptions similar to those used by art critics. From this analysis, the initial underlying hypothesis of fashion as a domain of aesthetic inquiry was validated on the basis of the following findings.

The significance of the authors' positions and the information concerning the authors' professions and backgrounds revealed that there was no distinction between art writers and fashion writers among eighteen out of a total of twenty writers chosen for this study. The authors' professions and backgrounds related primarily to art and art history rather than to fashion; accordingly, all the articles selected dealt with fashion as a subdivision of contemporary visual arts, with the exception of one piece, published in 1974, which focused on the managerial and display problems of a fashion exhibition. Twenty-eight out of thirty-two articles discussed fashion objects and events within an art historical context by locating various art styles (see "Locate the Style" in Table 2). Although the remaining four did not locate art styles, three of them did provide a high-level interpretation, arguably the most important element of postmodern art criticism. This lack of differentiation between art and fashion writers may be partly a consequence of the specific articles selected from the art magazines that represented the limitations of this study. The remaining two authors, however, were a fashion scholar (Valerie Steele) and a cultural studies scholar (Andrew Ross); yet their writings also appeared in art magazines, since they too treated fashion in an artistic context.

The major topics of the selected critical fashion writings were divided into four categories: fashion exhibitions, fashion trends, fashion designers, and fashion collections. Of these, the most frequent topic was fashion exhibitions held at galleries and museums, and the least frequent

was fashion collections. These findings indicate that writers in the artworld were most interested in fashion exhibitions, since the exhibitions were organized by art institutions and the fashions on display were selected by curators on the basis of the criteria needed to evoke an aesthetic experience, that is, as if the fashions were art objects. Although fashion collections were the least frequent topic, it is significant that the artworld writers did deal with fashion collections since collections were presented by designer houses primarily to show their new fashions to commercial buyers rather than to seek an aesthetic response. This may be an indication that writers within the artworld are becoming increasingly aware of aesthetic properties, even in commercially-presented fashions. As Richard Martin asserts, fashion's commercial aspects might not prevent the authors from appreciating fashion's aesthetic properties (Martin 1987: 26). Therefore, such commercial aspects could be considered as peculiar to fashion rather than as constituting a criterion for distinguishing fashion from art.

The second highest number of writers dealt with individual fashion designers' works, just as art critics often concern themselves with a single artist's works. Most of the writers selected fashion designers as their subject-matter because the designers do not simply try to cater to standard established tastes but try to break with them and shape new sensibilities through their aesthetic statements. The writers also showed interest in fashion trends, even though such trends are somewhat at variance with the artworld's customary subject-matter. Although conventional exhibitions were the most frequent topics and were distributed relatively evenly throughout the research period, articles on designers' works, trends and fashion collections were increasingly common, with most of them published during the latter half of the research period. (Of the nine articles devoted to designers, seven were published after 1987; of the eight articles on fashion trends, seven appeared after 1987; and both articles on collections were also published after this date.) These findings suggest that today's artworld writers acknowledge a broader range of fashion phenomena as potential subjects for their writings.

The majority of the authors came from the artworld, and it is significant that fashions were presented in art institutions; this suggests that fashion objects and events were treated by the authors in the artworld as if these phenomena were indeed part of the visual artworld. For instance, fashion's most distinctive formal aesthetic aspect was found to be its sculptural qualities. Since fashion has three-dimensional qualities in common with sculpture, several authors asserted that fashion, as a visual art, has a sculptural aesthetic and, as such, is created much like art. The growing number of fashion writings in art magazines was also noted. Over the sixteen-year research period (with the exception of two articles written in the 1970s), fashion articles appeared more frequently in the final eight years. During the latter half of the research period,

Table 2 Critical Judgments in Selected Critical Fashion Writings and Related Elements of
James D. Carney's Critical Model*

	Articles (as in Table 1)	Locate the Style	Value Features (judgment criteria)	High-level Interpretation (judgment criteria)	Critical Judgment
1.	T T T	not present	not present	not present	N
2.	V F	Romanticism	integration of 20th-century mechanical aesthetic and old fantasy/romantic currents (an artistic expression of vanity)	Psychoanalytic	P
3.	I AC C D	Geometric Abstraction	geometric shapes (lack of sociological implications)	Sociological	N
4.	B F M F	Classicism	a mixture of periods and cultures (artistic integrity)	Technological	P
5.	S J	Formalism	superior understanding of color and form, and functional design (a pure art form, the exact measurements and mathematical calculations of his design)	Technological	P
6.	E V	Double-coded Postmodernism	addressing social issues (proclaiming debatable issues & emphasis on sculptural aspects)	Sociological	P
7.	D W	Feminism	freedom for women (involvement with capitalism)	Political	P/N
8.	O	Surrealism	fetishism, metamorphosis, displacement—unconscious subverted reality (good presentation of the mutual influences of surrealism and fashion/miscategorization)	Psychoanalytic	P/N
9.	F S	Surrealism	displacement of dream imagery into reality (moving fashion into the realm of sculpture/ miscategorization)	Psychoanalytic	P/N
10.	L T M	not present	not present	Political (socio-political statement)	P

Table 2 Critical Judgments in Selected Critical Fashion Writings and Related Elements of
James D. Carney's Critical Model* (*continued*)

	Articles (as in Table 1)	Locate the Style	Value Features (judgment criteria)	High-level Interpretation (judgment criteria)	Critical Judgment
11.	C G	Double-coded Postmodernism	postmodern historicism (gravitational pull of classicism)	Cultural	P
12.	A V A	Pop Art	pop culture, the synthesis of look and emotion, commerce and politics (lack of political concerns)	Political	N
13.	S L	Modernism	the concept of maintenance and of uniforms (esthetic fashion rather than utilitarian purpose)	Psychoanalytic	N
14.	MFM ECTCD	Classicism	classical beauty (healthy, simple)	Technological	P
15.	T O	Futurism	force and velocity (lack of force and velocity, anachronistic)	Cultural	N
16.	D O	Fetishism	female objectification (sculptural qualities/overt erotic message)	Psychoanalytic	P/N
17.	A D A R K	Esthetic Movement	Esthetic Dress & economic and social egalitarianism (the concept of a simplified, beauty-giving garment)	Sociological	P
18.	C S	Fetishism	clichés of high-Modernist fetish practice	Psychoanalytic	N
19.	B A F	Deconstructionist Postmodernism	rejection of established norms in the fashion world (sartorial purity)	Cultural	P
20.	EAAPC	Deconstructionist Postmodernism	rejection of established norms in the fashion world (revolutionary normal look)	Cultural	P
21.	P A	Deconstructionist Postmodernism	deconstruction of established fashion values (marginalized maverick stances)	Cultural	P

	Articles (as in Table 1)	Locate the Style	Value Features (judgment criteria)	High-level Interpretation (judgment criteria)	Critical Judgment
22.	G V	Double-coded Postmodernism	postmodern historicism & eclecticism (coexistence of transience and perpetuity)	Cultural	P
23.	I L	Double-coded Postmodernism	postmodern appropriation (hysterical & illogical exaggerated style)	Psychoanalytic	N
24.	F A F	Antifeminism	degraded feminine look (unacceptable view of women)	Sociological	N
25.	R F	Deconstructionist Postmodernism	outmoded vintage fashions (frivolous & perverse without logical interpretation)	Cultural	N
26.	T E	Deconstructionist Postmodernism	local style tribalism (socially articulated style)	Sociological	P
27.	SVBGB	Postfeminism	born of excess (revisionist in spirit)	Political	P
28.	S G	not present	recession-proof chic (empty consumerism)	Psychoanalytic	N
29.	S H P	Realism	socially conscious modern woman (reflecting reality)	Sociological	P
30.	S C	Classicism	conservative chic and classy ideas (elegant, classic, chic)	Cultural	P
31.	S S	Double-coded Postmodernism	art/fashion symbiosis (borrowed glamour as a symbol of vulgar reverence of wealth)	Economic	N
32.	S F	not present	not present	Psychoanalytic (reflection of reality)	P/N

* *Abbreviations:* P = positive judgment; N = negative judgment; P/N = part-positive, part-negative judgment.
Note: The specific criteria for the judgment are enclosed in parentheses ().

twenty-three out of thirty articles were published, with eight of these appearing in 1995. This finding suggests that the artworld's recognition of the importance of fashion as art has increased in recent years, although its beginnings may in fact be traced to the late 1970s or the early 1980s.

It is evident that the vast majority of the writings reflected the key elements of Carney's model of art criticism. Most of the articles also located styles in terms of art history and analyzed and criticized fashion objects and events based on art styles' value features, as in art criticism. By using visual art criticism's methods and concepts for criticizing fashion, the authors in effect revealed their conception of fashion as a domain of aesthetic inquiry. As shown in Table 2, a critical judgment was provided in all the examples, including the three articles that did not provide value features. In "The Tens, The Twenties, The Thirties," which provided neither value features nor a high-level interpretation, the author, Blair Sabol, criticizes the exhibition on the basis of her own display and management preferences, and the article is thus an example of journalistic criticism. The other two articles that failed to list value features reached critical judgments based solely on high-level interpretations. For example, Valerie Steele in "Le Théâtre de la Mode," judges the fashions in the exhibition on the politically-based high-level interpretation that "there is something heroic about maintaining glamour even under a reign of terror" (Steele 1991: 19).

However, most of the authors' judgments were based both on value features and high-level interpretations. For example, in "Vanity Fair," Ronny H. Cohen locates designer Norma Kamali's voluminous outfits within Romanticism and judges them explicitly to be "highlights of [the exhibition]" on the basis of value features of Romanticism and as an expression of fantasy (Cohen 1978: 23). In "Fashion Shapes by James," Lawrence Campbell evaluates Charles James's fashions on the basis of their stylistic value features and the high-level interpretation. Campbell identifies James's structural fashions as formalism and describes their value features as possessing a superior understanding of color and form; Campbell judges these based on the value features ("a pure art form") and the technologically-based high-level interpretation ("the exact measurements and mathematical calculations of design"). In this way, the style-generated value features and the high-level interpretation provide the basis for the critical judgment in the fashion writings, as they would in art criticism.

From the preceding findings, the authors' conceptions of fashion reveal that fashion, as part of the visual arts, is inevitably related to the human body within society and thus has profound psychological, cultural, sociological, and political implications. Technology was also considered an important factor underlying the expression and accomplishments of fashion practitioners. As Diana Vreeland and Michel Boodro have asserted, fashion's relationship with commercial capitalism

is not without controversy. However, since art's commercial aspects often attract negative criticism, such controversial relationships would seem to constitute common ground between fashion and art. Despite the definition of fashion as clothing with an ever-changing nature, fashion's unrealistic frivolity was also a point of contention. Although fashion as a current cultural manifestation changes continually, it should seek to reflect the real needs of its wearers within society.

The most frequently located art style for the fashions discussed was postmodernism, which is also the dominant style in today's artworld. Furthermore, the overlapping interrelationship of fashion and art styles such as Romanticism and the Aesthetic Movement was also noted in the various locations of style. These findings imply that fashion, like contemporary visual art, currently expresses the postmodern aesthetic as its dominant mode and also shares common stylistic characteristics with art history throughout its own history. In addition, these findings also prove that Carney's model is an effective tool for analyzing critical fashion writings, since it allows for identification of methods, criteria, and conceptions of fashion.

Although a majority of the articles included most elements of Carney's model, the most divergent element in the fashion writings was a list of primary aesthetic features, that is, an analysis of structural traits, including representational, expressive, and exemplified features. In fact, fashions were approached as visual art objects by the authors. However, only twelve of thirty-two writings mentioned primary aesthetic features. Since an inherent characteristic of fashion is that clothing is made to be worn and to conform to the human body, it is possible that the authors of the twenty articles that did not list primary aesthetic features felt that it was more appropriate to focus on art-related issues within fashion's inherent limitations.

The high-level interpretation emerged as an important component of the critical fashion writings, since most authors interpreted fashion in the light of current social and aesthetic values. The psychoanalytic high-level interpretations valued contemporary fashion for addressing issues relating to human unconscious desires and fantasies; cultural interpretations reflected on fashion's intellectual and artistic implications; and sociological interpretations were primarily concerned with fashion in terms of collective and group behavior. (It should be noted that psychoanalytic, cultural, and sociological perspectives constituted the most important of the various critical considerations.) These findings suggest that fashion can be discussed and examined as a cultural artefact similar to art, although fashion's parameters are generally limited to the physical realities of the human body and to social identities both private and public.

The identified categories of high-level interpretation (psychoanalytic, cultural, sociological, political, technological, and economic) were similar to Howard Smagula's seven guiding principles of postmodern

art criticism (sociological, political, feminist, psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, ethnological, and economic) (Smagula 1991: 1) and to Arnold Berleant's external factors of the aesthetic field (biological, psychological, material/technological, historical, and social/cultural) (Berleant 1970: 74–90). In the analyses of the fashion writings, various postmodern critical viewpoints were found. As the language of the writings demonstrated, the authors reflected the use of postmodern terminology and categories of criticism. It is also suggested that the factors once regarded as external to the aesthetic domain are now emphasized as much as formal aesthetics in interpretations of fashion objects and events. This indicates that postmodern concepts of fashion tend toward an interdisciplinary approach so as to embrace diverse aesthetic forms and practices that enrich human experience in the same way as postmodern art. It seems that fashion has become a recognizable subject within the postmodern artworld as a result of broadened conceptions of fashion and art.

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