

LA "MODE-PEINTURE": PAINTING AND FASHION

1. A Chance Meeting

In 1992, in Sansepolcro on the occasion of the festivities which attended the fifth centenary of the death of Piero della Francesca (1410-1492), Italy offered an exhibition on the theme of fashion in the painting of the Quattrocento. Other central Italian cities - Arezzo, Monterchi, Urbino and Florence - where important paintings by Piero are conserved, participated in this retrospective project which was entitled "Nel raggio di Piero". In a certain way, the theme of this discussion on "Fashion and Representation" strikes me as an extension of the reflections of the organisers of last year at Sansepolcro, "Tessuti Italiani al tempo di Piero della Francesca" - Italian fabrics in the age of Piero della Francesca.¹

In the first part of this study, we shall consider painting as a source of documentation which today provides us with a wealth of information about the fashion of the time. The development of this approach will lead us to admit, as most historians have indeed admitted, that the way of dressing was already conceived as fashion. From there, we shall ask some questions regarding the eventual transhistorical character of the idea of fashion. In the second part, we shall concentrate on the inverse of this phenomenon, often repeated in the twentieth century: what happens in modernity is that painting becomes the source of fashion, and we see the birth of quite another type of relationship between fashion and painting. Through these two stages, our objective will be to analyse the dialogue between these two languages - fashion and painting - while seeking to understand the phenomenon by way of concrete examples in which fashion is painting.

¹ Of the reconstitution of the structure of the graphic design of "melagrana" in the catalogue of the exhibition: "Tessuti italiani al tempo di Piero della Francesca", Istituto Statale D'Arte 'G. Giovagnoli', Sansepolcro. Museo Civico, 7/5 - 31/8/1992, p. 66.

2. Fashion: A Constituent of the System of Painting

When one observes the works on exhibition at the Piero della Francesca retrospective one perceives that, when man is proposed as the centre of the painting, that which stands out in the works is the essential role of clothing in plastic composition. A preliminary look at the paintings reveals that both men and women, in spite of certain characteristics proper to the modelling of the clothes, wear robes, irrespective of their sex. An ancient way of dressing, well known to the Greeks and Romans, has evolved and, from the second half of the 14th century onwards, has undergone remarkable transformations. Piero della Francesca's fresco "Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba", one of the frescos in the "Legend of the True Cross" in the church of S. Francesco at Arezzo and dating from between 1452 and 1466 gives a good example of that which we shall view in greater detail.



Piero della Francesca: "Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba".
Arezzo, Church of San Francesco. 1452-1466.

Both men and women are dressed in robes with long and still fairly broad sleeves. The neckline does not really serve to distinguish between the sexes. In both sexes, the hair is hidden. The Queen of Sheba wears a sober head-dress. Her hair, drawn upwards, leaves her forehead entirely visible, and is covered and ornamented with a transparent veil which falls to the nape of her neck. Some of the ladies-in-waiting have their hair plaited in such a way that it forms a line around their heads. Attached to this is a small band of white material which appears in large white stitches, something like a rope, and serves to keep the hair in place. This arrangement is surmounted by a small white veil, attached above and lightly covering the ears. Of the men present, King Solomon wears a straight-brimmed black hat with a yellow ribbon around its upper part. The courtiers around him wear turbans of various sorts, concealing their hair.

Certain other variations deserve attention, in particular as regards the length of the robes. The robes of the ladies extend beyond their feet, and thanks to the breadth of the skirts stretch out on the ground into an abundant train. The robes of the men, however, continue as they were in antiquity, cut to a broad tunic which does not reach their feet. A further distinctive aspect lies in the fact that the robes of the women, unlike those of the men which are ample in their cut, are close-fitting at bust and waist. Here are the beginnings of the corsetted charm, of the modelling of the body, which in coming centuries will determine the cut of feminine dress.

The fresco stands out on an architectural background, and is made up of three parts. King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are placed in front of the central rectangle, of deep pink marble. To the left, the men are grouped in front of a rectangle in green marble. To the right, the woman are assembled into a group of their own, in a corner, in front of the columns and the other green rectangle.



Details of the tripartite composition of the fresco by Piero della Francesca: "Mèeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba". Arezzo, Church of San Francesco. 1452-1466.

n this way, the two groups of followers are united by the rectangles of the same colour, but also separated architecturally one from the other and from the royal couple. Furthermore, the distribution of chromatic qualities separates the two lateral groups from the two sovereigns. This separation is indicated in yet another way: one member of each of the two groups of courtiers is placed in front of the lines which mark out the royal rectangle. These two characters point out to us the ground on which the central scene is taking place. They watch it, and the direction of their gaze tells us where we should look: towards King Solomon as he receives and greets the Queen of Sheba.

The focal point of this meeting is the sovereigns as they clasp hands, and the reverence of the Queen, whose body is bowed forward as she bends her knee. Seen in profile, the Queen is on a lower level than the King, and her body straddles the two contexts marked out by the background rectangles. In consequence, the entire arrangement obliges us to keep our eyes on the centre of the scene, on the body of the King. Solomon occupies the middle of the fresco, and his body too takes on the geometrical form of a rectangle.

Yet there is more: Piero sets up another sort of architectural composition, constructed from the bodies of the ladies-in-waiting, as if to give prominence to the equal importance of the Queen of Sheba. The three ladies at the front are grouped in a semi-circle, and seem to echo the curve of the body of the Queen. The first, seen in profile, hand on hip, has her back to us and her right arm in the form of a triangle. Her position and posture constitute a barrier, which seems to provide perfect protection for her sovereign. Opposite her a second lady-in-waiting, dressed in green like the first, faces us, and her body protects the Queen exactly from the other side. These two axes are prolonged into a third, the lady-in-waiting dressed in pink, who completes the feminine triangle. The function of these watchful guardians is reinforced by the arrangement of their bodies, on the alert, rigid in posture, facial features immobile, hair perfectly in order.

By way of this geometric codification, and as it occurs in the rest of the fresco, one recognizes modes of life, different manners of taking one's position in society, distinct representations of the power engendered by social position. Here it is all depicted with precision. For this purpose Piero finds for each figure, and, above all, for the figures of the two sovereigns, an ensemble of characteristics which make their singularities evident. Here is the mark of the cult of the individual, the "Uomo singolare" of Leo Battista Alberti, the highest value of the Renaissance. This all brings concrete form to Vasari's lapidary phrase: "Uomini virtuosi ed artefici mobili".

To continue: one sees that the geometric regularity is traced out not only by the architectural construction of the background, where horizontal and vertical lines meet. At the level of the hands, one may draw a line - already marked by the King's sash - which runs through the entire fresco. Two further horizontal lines can also be perceived, one at head level, the other at the level of the feet. Other horizontal lines are formed by the architectural lines of the ceiling. All these parallel lines are crossed at a right-angle by the vertical lines of the columns and the rectangles, thus giving a series of interlocking blocks.

The overlay of illustration no. 5 makes this rectangular structure evident, and demonstrates the high degree of abstraction which underlies Piero's painting. To go further: at a still superficial level one can schematize the perspective construction which defines the depth of the space; but at a much deeper level, the roots of the Mondrianesque grid are already to be found.



Geometric abstraction in Piero della Francesca's fresco

Thus the geometric rectangle does not merely constitute a basis for the construction of the background; it should be emphasized, too, that the background represents a space **in front of which**, and not **within which** the action takes place. The geometric figure also provides the design which rules over the entire distribution of the fresco, including the distribution of the characters and their mutual relationships.

To this abstract plot another must be added, thanks to the colours which interfere powerfully in the construction of the fresco. In the lower part, the clothes form a chromatic mass, full of agreements between the qualities reds, greens, blues, yellows, blacks and whites. Through use of two different colours, Piero establishes the play between shade and light, as happens with the cape of the masculine figure in profile in the foreground; here deep pink is used to give light, while green creates shadow. The effect of light and shade is produced in accord with the geometric forms, and the two fuse into a chromatic mass which has the sculptural rhythm of a heraldic motif. In the upper part, on the other hand, the mass of colour is transformed, and underlines the individual figures of the principal characters and other participants. Each face has its own place and one may observe that the geometric

figure of the triangle and that of the semi-circle give coordination to this harmonious arrangement of the two sides of the royal couple.

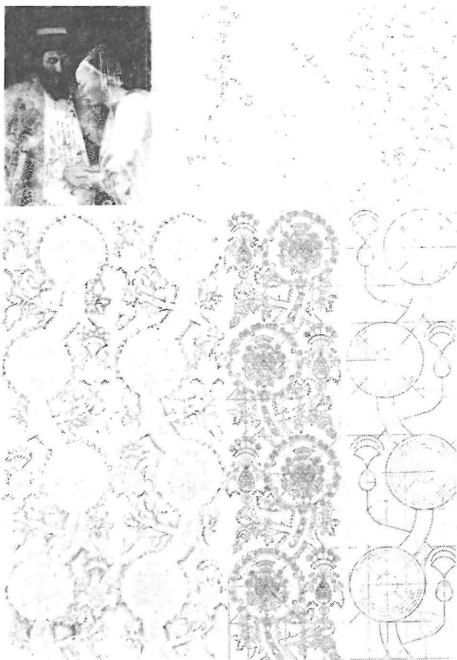
Among these characteristics there is yet another which attracts our attention to a far greater degree. Comparison of the male and female groups shows just how the male garments are more diverse and richer than those of the ladies. Let us turn to the clothes of the King and the Queen, in particular.

Over a blue tunic, the King wears a sleeveless cape, of the same length as the tunic itself. This garment, made of thick golden-yellow damask silk, is part of a plot of composition which imprisons our gaze by its beauty. On the space of the fresco one sees the King, one sees the central action between him and the Queen of Sheba, one sees the attitudes of the courtiers and the ladies-in-waiting who join in the scene. Yet what strikes the eye, in spite of all the rest of this sequence of acts and deeds, is the exuberance of the King's dress.

In essence, one's eye always returns to that cape, and one becomes absorbed in contemplation of the play of contrasts which it contains. On the golden-yellow material, a series of oppositions make evident the innovative character of Piero della Francesca's painting: the opposition between opacity and light, between empty and occupied space, between low and high relief, between figure and background, all of which give form to the very complex graphic motif.

The sumptuousness and the refinement of the painter's creation are concentrated in the decorative floral composition of the cape. The conception follows rigorous principles of geometry, to which the serpentine sinuosities of the figurative motif are applied. Everything is drawn with the precision of compasses, thus revealing Piero's project, calculated in every detail.

The distinction proper to the figure of the King does not arise only from his position in the geometric centre of the scene; it also comes from the geometry underlying the plastic quality of the cape. The cape itself becomes the principal element in giving the King his due importance.



Relief Detail of the fabric of King Solomon's cape.
Piero della Francesca. Arezzo

According to Rosalia Bonito Fanelli, who has studied the decorative motif known as "melagrana"², its meaning is "luxury - power - sacredness", and it was used only for the costumes of the very rich and of the highest dignitaries of the Church. The theme of the "melagrana" was widely introduced into the manufacture of Italian fabrics as a result of the intense commerce between Italy and the Middle East. The discovery of this motif by Piero certainly dates from his stay in Florence on the occasion of the Council of 1438. The purpose of this event was to reconcile the Eastern and Western Churches. The negotiations brought to Florence the imperial visitors and the authorities of the Church, and also a swarm of courtiers. Their presence brought to Tuscany a fashion from elsewhere, which caught the eye of all observers. By introducing into his work several of the elements of this fashion, Piero registers the impact of this luxurious costume not just on himself, but on the witnesses of his time.

² Fanelli, Rosalia Bonito: "Il motivo della melagrana nei tessuti italiani al tempo di Piero della Francesca". Catalogue of the exhibition "Tessuti italiani al tempo di Piero della Francesca". Op. cit. pp. 36-43.

While the richness of Solomon's garments serves to distinguish the royal figure in this scene, it also bears witness, in the history of textiles and costume, to the hand-crafted production of the cloth, linked to the technique of a particular age. Furthermore, it expresses the vogue for things oriental then common among the Italian public. In the case of this fresco by Piero, it is the painting which expresses the fashion.

If we now take a look at other paintings from other countries, painted at the same time, we shall see that national fashion already existed as one of the identification marks of social groups with their specific ways of life. Through dress, from shoes to hair style, the conceptions of beauty, taste, manners, behaviour proper to each society and in any given age are made manifest. As a result of this concern with things of the present, garments never appear as being codified merely by chance; quite on the contrary, they are the fruit of a detailed reconstitution of an age, at one and the same time subject to the rules for the internal coherence of the motif used and the external need to match the taste and conditions of manufacture of that age.

However, if the concept of fashion as collective and transitory habits in matters of dress is different and specific from one society to another, it is also true to say that one comes across the same fabrics everywhere - of Italian origin, Florentine velvet, Venetian brocades etc., in the paintings of a variety of countries. To put it another way, the basic materials for clothing never cease by their very presence to underline the importance of Italy in the creation of international fashion - even at that time and perhaps more at that time than at any other!

In a Renaissance painting, the figures are grouped so as to add up to an organic whole. They are structured in relation to an ensemble, where all the parts are connected to each other and where each has a function as a constituting element. The action is represented by strict observance of the rules of harmony and linear perspective. So the figures are integrating elements of created space; they are distributed and placed in this space in certain **positions** - horizontal, vertical, inclined - and there they adopt certain **postures** - including sitting, standing, or lying down.

And yet the bodies of the figures are dressed; they are fused to their clothes. It is as if there were a second skin which, while covering the first, composes with it the final appearance which the figure assumes as an actor upon the painted scene. And

then the scene itself is, so to speak, "dressed", by the ensemble of furniture, of objects, and of accessories which make up the *décor* of the environment. When one compares works over a period of time, one observes that the dressing of the scene lasts longer than that of the body; thus we may confirm that fashion, even in those times, was a short-lived habit.

While each garment is characteristic of a *vogue*, of a particular mode, clothing also adds up to an "architecture" of textiles, in which every line has its sense: the ensemble of objects in fabric serves on the one hand to cover the human body, to conceal it, to protect it, and on the other to embellish it, to ornament it, and to bestow upon it a particular character with the aim of marking clearly its role on the scene. What is codified by clothes is a specific and ephemeral taste, an actorial role in a narrative set in time and space; but it is also a conception of the body, of the socio-economic and cultural position of the individual in his peer group, of his psychological character, his humours. In more general terms, clothes help to transmit the values of a society; they carry with them a conception which is both ethical and aesthetic.

3. The Problem of Relationships Between Systems

If it can be said in the history of painting, fashion has always had its very important place due to its way of characterizing habits, social levels, cultures, and of setting the painted motif in space and time, it may also be noted that there comes a change with the 20th century. Here, the opposite occurs and it is fashion which now makes use of painting. This is all the more surprising when we reach the moment at which fashion is nourished upon abstract painting. This has a notable effect on the sense qualities of the colours, on the lines, on the matter, on the form, and no longer on a relationship of representation between the objects, the things of the "natural world" and the constituting elements of the work. Is this change not in itself a fashion, too? Or is it a real transformation of the link between fashion and painting?

The aim of this research is to study this inversion of the relationships of influence on the basis of a choice from among the best-known uses: the use of Art Nouveau by Maison Worth, of the Suprematist scheme by Kenzo ³, of the plastic vocabulary of

³ With regard to this, cf. my own article "Abstraction, un mode de vie au XXe siècle" in: *Revue de la Asociación Vasca de Semiotica* (Bilbao; to appear in 1994).

Mondrian by Yves Saint Laurent and Jean-Charles de Castelbajac, and of the principles of the painting of Jackson Pollock by Popy Moreni.

4. The Worth Case: Art Nouveau in Fashion

Nearly a century before the appearance of our chosen corpus of study, one may detect examples in which **haute couture**, then at its moment of birth, had incorporated in its creations certain aesthetic qualities from artistic movements. What is of specific interest to us is to isolate and explain the way in which this incorporation takes place.

One of the most striking cases is the use to which Maison Worth has put Art Nouveau. Charles-Frédéric Worth (1826-1874) established in 1857 his maison de couture at No. 7, rue de la Paix. This event made Paris in the 19th century the capital of fashion - or, rather, of **haute couture**. The idea of drawing, the practice of working up the sketches had commenced once and for all. The style created by Worth was founded essentially on the exploitation of classical models. In their forms, as we have seen in the frescos by Piero, clothes continue to outline the parts of the feminine body, but Worth puts much more emphasis on this, so that the overall line of the body, the silhouette, takes on the form of an 'S'.

It is important to note that parallel with fashion which held tradition as theme (particularly that of the 18th century), Maison Worth underwent the influence of its time. It was the age of the Art Nouveau movement; finding influence there, Maison Worth also proclaimed the plastic principles of Art Nouveau and rejected the classical references inherited from the Renaissance. This involved a refusal to submit to symmetry, the abandoning of types of deformation of nature imposed by Graeco-Latin canons, a revolt against the elitism attached to the so-called 'noble' arts, by opposition to the decorative arts regarded as 'minor'. In the end, Worth knew very well how to absorb the movement for the renovation of the decorative arts and architecture which arose at the end of the 19th century. The rehabilitation of the decorative arts, then qualified as "applied" arts for industry, was in full force, and it was in this atmosphere that Maison Worth established a new sort of relationship between the conception, the cutting, and the manufacture of garments. The following illustration makes more explicit the connection between the creation

of Maison Worth and the Art Nouveau movement; it also provides the first elements necessary for us to focus on fashion as art.



Creation by Maison Worth, Paris. 1898-1900.

The thick, compact silk makes possible the creation of the curvilinear volume of the silhouette, which stands out and is very clearly marked. With the adjustment of dress to body, the oblique lines are arranged in parallels which form a curve on each side of the upper part of the dress at the level of the bust. From waist to feet the dress falls voluminously, and a long train extends it on the ground. On a white background, supple and sinuous lines trace a pattern inspired by flowers. The

dynamic effect of the curved lines, which never stop circulating even when the body is at rest, tends to determine a mobility towards the infinite, as if descending from the vertical to reach the horizontal. Upon touching the ground to the swinging rhythms of the body, the curvilinear movement reverts to the vertical and explodes into the entire silhouette. With this to-and-fro movement, the curved black lines produce on the white of the silk a distinctive effect of instability of variation, which fluctuates irregularly according to each dimension.

If, on the one hand, one has the effect of the train which ends the dress by describing a semi-circle on the ground, on the other hand the shoulders and neck are revealed by a neck-line which also traces out a semi-circle. In accordance with the harmonic reverberations unleashed by the curved lines, the short sleeves are built up through repeated alternation of the black and white fabrics which gives continuity to the curving lines and echoes the semi-circles of the other extremities.

To end this brief commentary, it should be said that this creation by Maison Worth creates Art Nouveau in fabrics. There is here an entire construction of lines and colours dominated by the omnipresence of rhythm, of dynamism, of the energetic force of movement, and of contrast. All this transposes into fashion the tangible qualities of Art Nouveau, without at any time making a mere copy. In reality, this is a transcoding operation. In the system of fashion, line is not used to imitate what was being done at the same time in architecture, or in interior decoration. On the contrary, the lines here follow their own direction, insofar as they have the aim of dressing women aesthetically, and of thus making it possible for us to contemplate, **on the body**, the principle characteristics of the Art Nouveau movement.

5. The Search for Abstract Painting in Fashion

5.1 Sonja Delaunay, integrator of systems

The conquest of a new way of representing movement was the goal of a number of approaches to art at the beginning of the 20th century. In fashion, Worth had shown that the body, essentially a source of movement, could be dressed with the same dynamism as it produced: movement-vestment, constructed from lines and forms. After Worth comes Paul Poiret (1879-1914), whose work is a transition; his contribution was, above all, the exploration of other types of possibility - those offered by

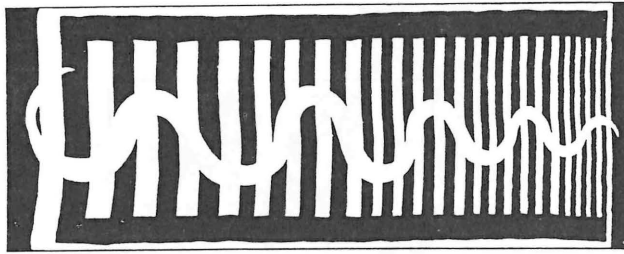
light. The movements of colours, which found dynamic representation in the work of the impressionists, led Poiret to conceive a different silhouette for the female body. He proposed a return to straight robes, to classical forms, to the simplicity of the tunics of antiquity; in doing so, he launched a fashion in which verticality governed the movement of the body over the horizontal surface of the world. While restricting the length of stride by increasingly narrow skirts, he dealt simultaneously with line, form, colour and movement.

Fashion had set out upon a radical change, of course, but in the case of Worth and the case of Poiret it found, in Art Nouveau and impressionism respectively, much more than a simple and momentary source of inspiration. These creators transposed one aesthetic system into another, transposed painting into fashion. In the framework of the same type of transposition between languages, Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) found a means of renewal for fashion, not through changing the silhouette of the woman, but in creating her garments together with certain artists. One of these was Salvador Dali, who designed for her pockets in the form of drawers and painted a lobster garnished with parsley for an evening gown. In a case like this, we no longer speak of dialogue between codes, nor of the appropriation of systems, nor even of transcoding, but rather of complementarity between them. Yet it was only with the creations by Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979) that the link between fashion and painting became not a translation from one language to another, but a truly creative integration of two languages.

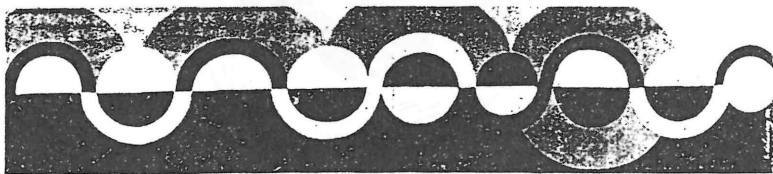
Once again, the representation of movement and the search for colour constitute the aesthetic principle underlying the handbags, the scarves, the gowns, the mantles, and particularly the fabrics, with their dazzling colours, which are characteristic of the conception and production of Sonia Delaunay. Her creations exploit and set value upon the movements of the body and the movements of coloured rhythms. On her stand one can no longer distinguish between fabrics destined for wearing on the body and fabrics to be hung on walls. Both domains are fields for investigation: colours circulate and movements give colour. Sonia Delaunay has written of herself and her husband, the painter Robert Delaunay, "Colour has become for us a means of expression as vital as the word".

Vitalism is present in daily life as an integral part of man, who not only undergoes change himself but also inhabits a world of perpetual change. In colours and forms in uninterrupted movement, in the time and space of the canvas, the artist

configures the expression of that which defines the true condition of man and the world: change. In his attempt to impose order on it, the artist translates change into the play of variations between states of equilibrium and absence of equilibrium, between transformation and rest, the rhythmic structure of which is made up of modulations of duration in space. Sonia Delaunay expresses this ensemble of characteristics through her dynamicity of colours, her geometrical colours, her play on lines, making of these elements the motor of her creations.



"The Serpent"



"Endless Rhythm"

Some illustrations of her fashion accessories exemplify the integration of the aesthetic quest - fashion and painting - to that of the life of individuals. In this printed silk (Crêpe de Chine) scarf, called "The Serpent", or the other entitled "Endless Rhythm", the coextensive link between art and life is encoded. In both cases the abstract forms are serpentine, drawing out a sinuous, tortuous course, susceptible of prolongation to the infinite. In the oppositions between the black and white

horizontal lines and the serpentine line which crosses them, in the oppositions between the semi-circle which, in their echo-like distribution draw out circles which always come back to their starting point and thus also compose a serpentine line, the two scarves give presence to a vast game between clear and obscure, light and shade, colour and non-colour, known and unknown, positive and negative.

In the end, this "endless rhythm" could well be the circulation of the values, the ideas, the energies which the scarf, encircling the neck, fragments to make it visible. Similarly, the scarf is nothing more than a fragment itself, of a whole which is endlessly repeated.



Etudes de femme, 1923.

Sonia Delaunay, "Studies of a Woman". 1923.

In one of Sonia Delaunay's "Studies of a Woman" (1923), the place occupied by the circle, the triangle, and their geometric variations in the work explain the geometric treatment of the woman's body, a conception repeated throughout her sketches and given concrete form in her clothes.



Sonia Delaunay, "Electric Prisms". 1914.

In her "Electric Prisms" (1914), a large painting, square in format, orthogonal in composition, the colours of the prism and the light are translated in plastic terms by the decomposition of the disc-like forms into facets of colour. The forms given by the "simultaneous colours advance retreat in the bidimensionality of the planes which they define. The kinetic quality of colour in the artist's painting is reflected, with the same impact on the perceptions, in the kinetic quality of spiral lines in one of her dresses.



Sonia Delaunay: evening gown

The movement of the circles, also lines electrically rolled in upon themselves, embroidered in the transparent fabric of the dress, has the effect - thanks to the fabric used - of giving exterior expression, through their own materiality, to both the play of light and the play of the lines. With the natural movement of the body the kinetic power is even more strongly grasped. Here, one recognizes the principles which Sonia Delaunay uses in painting - but now they are applied to the body and made to work through the means of the garment itself.

In the case of Sonia Delaunay, one is at the same time inside two processes of codification: that of painting and that of the creation of fashion. One cannot speak here of the creative appropriation of a code, as one has in the case of Worth. There is, rather, an integration between codes, a transitivity guided by one and the same quest. Discoveries which touch upon rhythm and upon colour are taken in like manner from both sides.

Sonia Delaunay, with her "simultaneous atelier" on the boulevard Malesherbes, was a unique example in that she did not separate the two arts. Such a mode of creation, in a double sense, has not, so it would seem, led to further development. Examples which followed were, as happened with the Maison Worth, cases where couturiers seized upon the works of a painter on the general principles of a movement to make use of them, in a wholly unilateral sense, in the construction of their works.

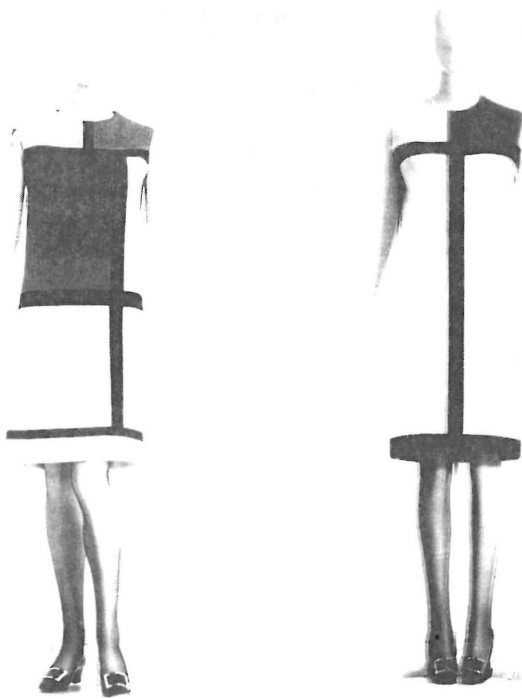
5.2 Mondrian, paradigm of fashion. From Yves Saint Laurent to De Castelbajac

Among painters, Mondrian was one of those whose works have been most widely used to a point where one might ask: to what extent does a particular use of constructivist design really amount to art. By examination of some examples, we travel through almost forty years of use of Mondrian's art as a matrix for production. What are the relationships between creation, copying, invention, re-invention and transformation?

In a declaration which reflects Mondrian's aesthetic horizon, Yves Saint Laurent (1936) has affirmed: "My business is to work for women. Not just for mannequins, or for rich or beautiful women. But for all women." (1982) In Mondrian's painting, and also in the ensemble of his theoretical postulations, forms become neutral; they are used as purely plastic values. Through rectangular planes, coloured and uncoloured, an expression of relationships of equivalence, and through straight lines - horizontal and vertical, intersecting at right-angles - Mondrian proposes a rhythm founded on the play of "equivalent oppositions". What is characteristic of this schema, founded on the use of pure colours and having recourse to the absolute of forms, is that neither the colours nor the forms thus used seek to mask the construction of the work. Through the play of positive and negative, Mondrian shows the deep structure of things which, like human life, is a matter of rhythm, through

harmonic relationships between the parts and the whole. In this quest for unity, for simplicity, for the essential (through renunciation of detail to the benefit of the ensemble), one may find again the age-old heritage of abstractisation of global space, used by Piero della Francesca. In his Autumn-Winter collection of 1965-1966, Yves Saint Laurent, too, sought for a fashion which would correspond to the expression of simplicity and elegance. The opposing rhythms of life, formulated in the neo-plasticism of Mondrian and already consecrated in a number of other domains outside painting itself, appeared to Saint Laurent as a possible way of doing this.

Into the verticality of the body, he introduced the harmony of pure relationships. Here, one is very far from a mere copy or from a simple imitation of plastic principles, given that these principles are here incorporated into the very system of creation, and that they also serve to dress a body - and that body, too, will be defined in itself by the intersection of vertical and horizontal lines.



Yves Saint Laurent: dress

Yves Saint Laurent: dress

A straight line cutting across other lines at a right-angle: this is how one at once sees the cut of the dress, a large rectangle in a single piece, with no well-marked waist-line. The basis of this meticulously calculated geometry of black lines is a horizontal yellow plane which surrounds the entire lower part of the dress. Through perfect proportion of the planes, the white rectangles, which form a second series of planes on the dress, sustain the opposition between the red rectangle and the blue rectangle of the third and fourth series of rectangular planes. By this structure of balanced oppositions, the rectangular form is neutralized and the three primitive colours - yellow, red and blue - give the rhythm of the composition.

Saint Laurent is also a constructivist creator. The dress is based on the perfect harmony of contrasts and, through these plastic means, the beauty of the dress expresses the universal.

This garment invites the eye to a contemplative attitude, and transmits Mondrian's aesthetics to a new clientele. While a broader public is thus reached, one sees at the same time a reduction of the effects on the perceptive senses, based on the plastic qualities of Mondrian's work. This is because the dress, even more than the fabric, appeals to the sense of touch. Touch is the proper sense for the perception of clothes. The material nature of the fabric, its texture, the way in which it is cut - this creates **contact** with the skin. The dress is something which can be felt, all over the body. One of the various consequences is that fashion is not restricted to a matter of what can be seen; the perceptive proposal of this painting-dress is as much tactile as it is visual.

A further case in which Mondrian is taken as a paradigm for the creation of fashion comes to us from the models of Jean-Charles de Castelbajac and specially from his Winter collection 1982-1983. This couturier has also based his fashion on the works of less well-known painters; these creations do not, however, enter into the present context. In fact, the plastic qualities of Mondrian's constructivism will be found once more in the dresses of de Castelbajac, with some amendments, with certain redefinitions, particularly because the rules of perfect distribution in accordance with the golden mean are transformed by other rules of distribution.



Jean-Charles de Castelbajac: dresses

The dress on the left is a large quadrilateral; one sees that even the long sleeves are cut in accordance with this geometric figure. The quadrilateral contains an arrangement of contiguous squares, in red, orange and brown, demarcated by thick black lines which cross at right-angles. In the dress on the right, the squares are replaced by rectangles, equally distributed over front and back. The pockets of both models follow the same construction.

One discovers oneself confronted with a certain automatism of language which rests upon the observation of just one single rule: follow the quadrilateral formation. The play of neutralization of the forms no longer serves as a basis for production of oppositions between pure colours. If one looks at all three colours at the same time, juxtaposed on the thick fabric, one notices that they are mutually influential, and that in no way do they produce the same effects as Mondrian. By comparison with what appears in the case of pure oppositions, here the contrary is true: the red stripe side by side with the yellow stripe, turns slightly towards violet, while the yellow stripe turns towards green. When two colours are juxtaposed, each gives the same effect as if each had been mixed respectively with the complementary colour of the other. As has been known since Chevreul, one then sees the simultaneous contrasts. It is

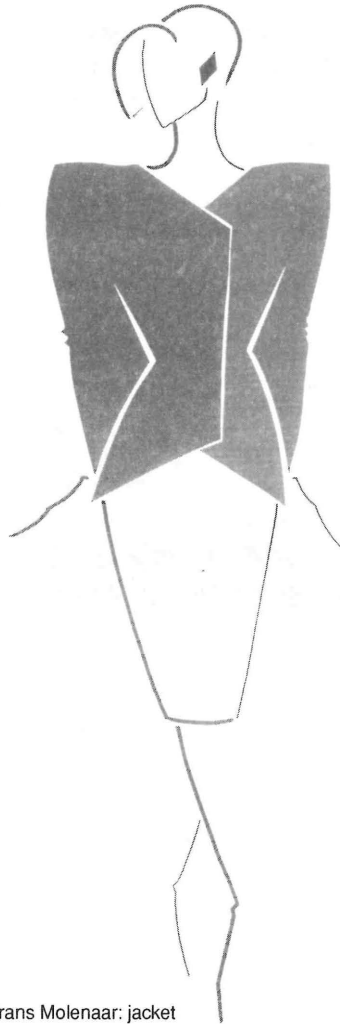
definitely the case that, if the eidetic construction of de Castelbajac's dresses is a derivation from Mondrian's grid, his chromatic solution is closer to a solution of the Fauviste type. De Castelbajac has found inspiration in Mondrian, but his works propose other aesthetic solutions.

A third example taken from the same collection, a white gown, shows how colour is essential to de Castelbajac's creations. The gown is cut in the form of a rectangle, and this geometric figure reoccurs in the long sleeves and in the braid on the upper part. The four figures are embedded, and the turns of all the edges of the large white rectangle are decorated with features in colour: red, blue and yellow. These are primary chromatic rays which, contained within the white light, are engendered by it. But the coloured features, when juxtaposed, forming the line which contains the white, give rise to an effect of an harmonic whole.

Mondrian's work taken as paradigm, produces, on the one hand, in Saint Laurent a transposition of the same aesthetic principles, a sort of transcreation, of intersemiosis; in de Castelbajac, on the other hand, it gives a transformation of the constructivist model which leads to a parallel language.

5.3 Frans Molenaar and abstract geometric fashion

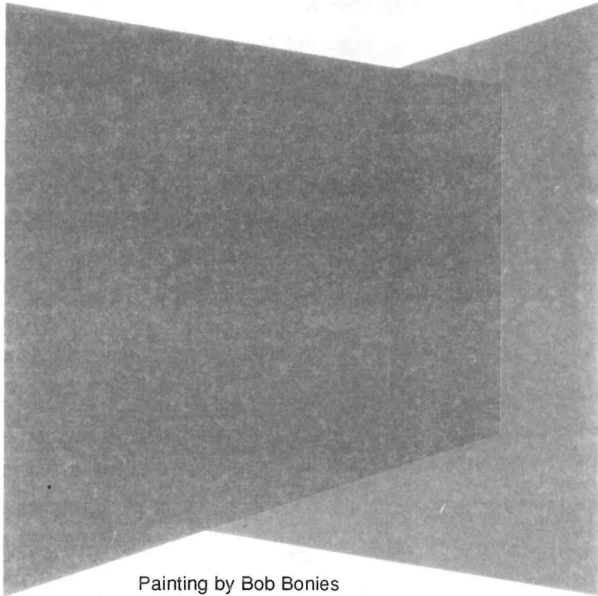
From the sixties' onwards, the creations of Frans Molenaar, making evident the complex articulation of the cut, have aimed at recreating not the forms of the body, but rather the geometric forms in the body. His answer tends to the development of a fashion in which the body is taken as a rectangle. Upon this figure, Molenaar articulates other geometric figures - triangles and lozenges - which, juxtaposed to the basic rectangle, are contrasted by the pure colours - to a point where a combat takes place between the coloured forms. This battle takes place within planes which, in their turn, enter into conflict at another level, in the sense that all the planes are seen at the same time, colliding with each other but without any of them gaining the upper hand over any other.



Frans Molenaar: jacket

Molenaar's objective is to create clothes according to the principles: of German geometric abstractionism. If one takes a close look at one of his creations one sees that each colour, the very surface of which draws out a geometric form, is placed in relation to another colour which also follows a geometric design. The form-colours are placed in separate planes, without depth. From one plane to another and without hierarchy, the blue rectangle is juxtaposed with the red rectangle. In this

way the organization of forms in the plane nature of space is obtained by the opposition of pure colours. Contrasting from one plane to another, the colours of the rectangles intersect, giving rise to triangles, which are also symmetrically formed. The specific quality of Molenaar's clothes comes from this integration of pure colours and geometric figures. Together with the gravitational movement of the body, the rigorously symmetrical arrangement makes manifest the dynamicity of rhythm, marked by the implosions and explosions of the angles.



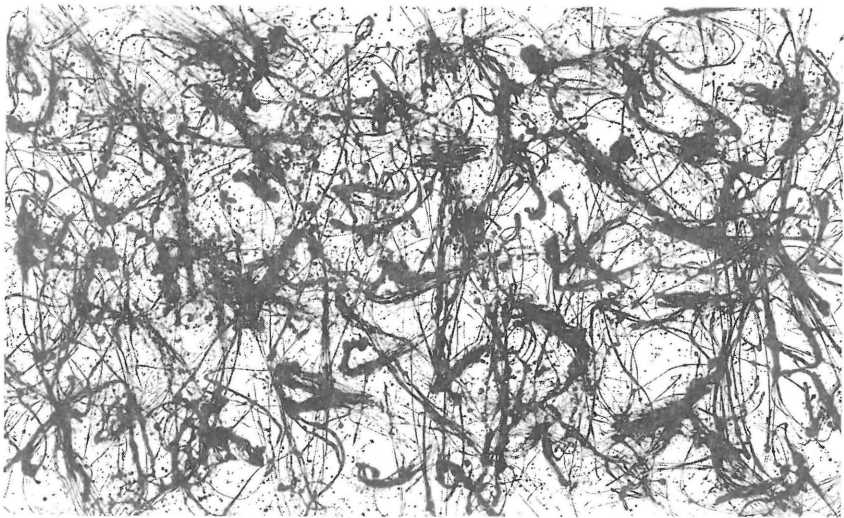
Painting by Bob Bonies

At an exhibition in Utrecht in 1989, Frans Molenaar's dresses were presented side by side with the paintings of Bob Bonies, and to the music of Simeon ten Holt. The event showed through this 'triptych' of codes (the title of the Exhibition was "Constructivist Triptych") how these creations reflected and echoed each other.

Followed by a path quite his own, Molenaar's quest crosses those of Worth, Sonia Delaunay, Castelbajac and Yves Saint Laurent. Even if there are differences in the plastic means employed and the conceptions of the body, each of these fashion designers seeks in his or her own way to reincorporate in the garments the movement of the body. The result is the emergence of rhythm as a sense effect.

5.4 Pollock in the transparency of Popy Moreni

The transparency of the painting of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) allows one to see the beige colour of the fabric; this underlines the fabric as support for the painting, on which other colours are superimposed and interlock. In that period of Pollock's work which is of particular interest to us here, there are no more figures on his canvases, but only marks, lines, spots, patches, obtained by putting the canvas on the ground and then upturning the paint pots on it so that the paint can spread everywhere. The body of the painter and the body of the canvas are in strict relationship under these conditions. Pollock mixed the paste of industrial paints with sand or ground glass, so as to play with consistencies and the fluidity of the liquid, and he used a stick rather than the traditional tools of the painter. Large surfaces are painted at random and differ from each other not in bearing new themes but by the composition of interlacing lines, of drops which may or not be absorbed by the canvas, by variations in density, opacity or luminosity of patches and spots, by the full and empty parts on the canvas. Through the grain of his canvases (and in the same way as one might say "between the lines" of a text) Pollock makes evident the time and the duration of the very process of production. It is the rhythm, now slow, now fast, of the aleatoric gestures by which the painter lets the colours spread by themselves on the canvas which determines the final configuration of interlacing spots and lines. Thus, the only image which these works allow one to see is that of the corporal rhythm adopted by the painter.





Popy Moreni: dress

In taking Pollock (III. 19) as the paradigm of his creation, Popy Moreni lays direct hold by the transparency of the fabric upon the tangible presence of the body, of a body dressed exactly to be shown. At the very moment when the dress, cut like a tunic, shows the body, it is the movements of the body in their turn which animate the labyrinthic motifs traced out by the black lines and patches on the fabric of the dress.

Moreni's intention is to show that the dress organizes itself of its own accord on the surface of the body. To bring the feminine form into relief he makes very little use of traditional ways of cutting; it is the body itself as it sways, as it comes and goes in all its dynamics, which constantly gives the dress its design. Like Pollock's canvases, Moreni's dress is the product of an expression of gestures, which emanates from the rhythm of the body inside.

6. Conclusions

One step now remains for us: to explain the link between the various separate cases studied in the course of our journey - a journey through the history of a type of fashion which takes painting as a source of creative inspiration. This final step will allow us a number of conclusions. Analysis of samples of the work of these creators and, above all, comparisons between them, have led us to certain constants. We shall now look more closely at these constants, as they are explained through the ensemble of the clothes under consideration.

6.1 Rhythm, the connection between sense effects

The first constant to stand out here is rhythm - rhythm as one of the foundations of the aesthetics of fashion. Looking at the illustrations as a whole, we have returned systematically to the same question: where do the black lines in the creations of Worth, of Delaunay, or of Moreni, finally end? In the very act of concentrating on them during our search for an answer, we come upon other questions in new formulations. What is the significance of the diversity of rhythmic themes? From the viewpoint of the person on the receiving end, what effects do these themes set up?

According to the examples analysed here, rhythm arises through the distribution of lines, of forms, and of colours in space. Or, to put it another way, it is the manner in which these elements, which themselves compose space, behave. As behaviour, rhythm can be observed and can be defined as the search for constants and variables in the ensemble of a given work.

What Popy Moreni - inspired by Jackson Pollock - has created in his line is a devil-may-care sort of rhythm under great tension which annuls the cadence between the beginning and the end of the movement. The other couturiers - together with Piero della Francesca, whose fresco has been used here as a fashion document - use a less tense rhythm, controlled in its intensity. It is a contracted rhythm, be it through repetition of a cycle, be it through use of series, or through the sequentialisation of the stages of a movement. Within the space of a garment, it doesn't much matter whether the outline of the body is corsetted or whether it is not very clearly defined; the dimensions developed by the couturiers are, after all, always the same. That is, the exclusion of any fixed delimitation of the extent of a movement, the cycles of

transformation of action, of movement in time and space, and the process of becoming in itself.

Rhythmic variations may occur in a centrifugal direction - from the "interior" of a dress towards its "exterior", or from the body towards the world in general, or from the outside inwards. But in the dresses of these stylists the black lines, the geometrical forms, the colours furnish an ever-changing scansion of the distribution of duration. In the clothes of Moreni, this is punctuated by calligraphic arabesques in a sequence of irregular intervals. This brings out the extreme acceleration of uninterrupted movement, turned in various directions. In the works of Worth, on the other hand, inspired by Art Nouveau, the floral arabesque gives regularity to the intervals of the occurrences. In the dresses by Sonia Delaunay it is the curves in their continuity and their return upon themselves which provide the articulation between the composing elements. For de Castelbajac, Yves Saint Laurent and Molenaar, geometrical figures modulate the repetition of the cycles of movement, the serial movement, or the progression of the phases. They impose a cadence on an endless rhythm, one which is no longer to be recognized in a frenzy of change, but which is controlled by the laws which rule over the ordering of duration.

Yet chromatic variation, too, is a way of demonstrating the periodic return of sequences of movement in the creations of Sonia Delaunay and of de Castelbajac. In the works of Molenaar it is pure colours which give substance to geometrical forms. They are taken at the very instant of the confrontation of their forces, and they indicate the high point of tension - strong rhythm. In this case there is rapid motion, and it gains further acceleration as a result of the exploding triangles which increase it more; in the quadrilaterals and circles this motion occurs in the process of movement which generalizes instants. Speed is neutralized by the balance of pure oppositions between lines, colours, geometrical forms; and planes and everything else are distributed in accordance with the golden mean. The limitation of plastic resources and their objective arrangement by the rules of symmetrical distribution, marking either the likeness between the opposing elements or the proportionality between their agreements, produce an organized rhythm. In the creations of all these couturiers, rhythm is the schema around which the composition is constructed.

Thus we are led to see, in the creations studied here, the continuity, the uninterrupted nature of time. This, at the junction between interior and exterior,

causes us to apprehend an unbroken line of space as well, a line which enters past, present and future. The relative lack of determinacy which results from the fixed non-demarcation of the spatio-temporal stages leads us to grasp time and space in the sphere of subjectivity.

In all cases, the observer is asked to react to the tension-producing invitations of the rhythms - rhythms of lines, of geometrical figures, of colours. If, on the one hand, an increase in speed imposes on their direction a feeling of emergency, of uncontrollability, of the unknown, on the other hand a well-ordered speed transmits the effects of the controllable, the measurable, known direction. In this sense, the dynamics of the rhythm develop from schemes of temporalization of actions, from schemes of transformations or of forms in the process of becoming, of schemes of guided behaviour. It is at this level that rhythm is an articulation of the acts and phases of duration; it is an energy which awakes and which is capable of causing reactions in the excitable system of perception of the observer, on whom rhythm unleashes its thymic effects.

If there is indeed a possible point at which all these examples might converge, it has to do with dynamics - the dynamics of the body, whether in movement or at rest. Clothes interfere directly with movement to the point where they accompany that movement, they underline it, they sometimes restrain it - or, on the contrary, they invite it and, in a certain sense, control it. Thus, in its relationship to the movement of the body to that which is internal to it, a garment constitutes a second and external movement. The union of these two movements gives rise to fashion in such a way that rhythm is one of the kernel elements of fashion aesthetics.

6.2 Intersemiotic translation: the link in the process

Our journey through fashion has been a journey through the diachronic vastness of fashion history. Along the way, we have taken time to consider several synchronic stages which have shown us how the connections between fashion and painting have undergone complex transformations. The abstraction of space, clearly shown in Piero della Francesca's fresco "Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba", has followed a long and firm path in the history of painting. In the 20th century, a number of movements which have proclaimed a vogue for abstraction in painting have illuminated to us, among other things, the fact that the underlying basis of

figurative art has always been dominated by abstraction. The tendency in painting to the elimination of detail, of the identifying features of the particular, and even of the whole figurative nature of the themes painted, and to the construction of planes, of colours and of forms in juxtaposition, organized on the basis of a new conception of the space on the canvas, has placed abstraction on the level of the apparent surface of the canvas. This has happened to such a degree that the traditional parameter for classification - figurative or abstract painting - has step by step lost its pertinence.

Since the Quattrocento and with the painting by Piero, we have seen that painting is in search of a materiality proper to its language. As an immediate consequence, painting was even at that time developing in the direction of geometrical abstraction. The choice of this path has placed more emphasis on eidetic and chromatic qualities (to use the terms proposed by Felix Thurlemann⁴, current among semioticians) in their role in the composition of plastic language. It may be this which best explains the somewhat tardy discovery of Piero's painting as one of the artistic oeuvres which mostly deals with plastic resources as such. It is thanks to the elective affinities between the 20th century and this tendency in Piero that modern art has been able to understand and spread the splendour of this aesthetic state. At the beginning of our century, abstraction ceases to be a collection of rules for construction which allow the handling of themes of paintings: it becomes the theme itself. This return to the purity of plastic resources - a characteristically metalinguistic step - has made an enormous contribution to the interactions between the codes which have multiplied so greatly with the advent of industrial and, above all, post-industrial society.

The result is the formation of a language borrowed from at least two different codes. The phenomenon has been baptised with the name of "hybridisation" from biology. These days, however, "multimedia" is more current, given that hybridisation goes well beyond the meeting of two systems.

When fashion puts forward a plastic vocabulary and the themes of painting as one of its aesthetic principles, it also transcodies them into its own universe. When this use comes to operate as one of the strategies of creation in fashion, it is the

⁴ Thurlemann, F. (1982). "Paul Klee. Analyse sémiotique de trois peintures". Lausanne. L'Age d'Homme.

equivalent of an operation of translation from one system to another. Yet this translation can take on a variety of forms.

First, fashion can be constructed "in the manner of" such and such a painter, or artistic movement. In this case, the relationship between fashion and painting is one of imitation, of a copy. When fashion takes painting as an original, it confers upon it the role of matrix, of prototype - in exactly the same way as it does with the iconographic paradigm of folklore, or cinema, or the seasons, or fashion in other times.

In a case such as this, the question of the fidelity of the copy to its original must be raised. But can a copy maintain a relationship of fidelity between what it creates and what it imitates? As soon as one represents something in the same or in another code, one is engaged in a mimetic activity, an activity of translation - and in these domains fidelity is pure myth. All mimetic processes, all processes of translation end up by showing that, whatever attempt be made to make one thing "like" another, the product of creation is placed in the domain of resemblances. And this, right at the end of the creative chain, may even result in negation of the identity of the original. To put it another way, "in the manner of" another researcher, Haroldo de Campos, in this empire of intra- and extra-systemic translation, one arrives at treachery, dissimulation, omission, complementation, transvestitism, deceit, pastiche, and, in the end, "transluciferian" fantasy ⁵.

The aim of the couturier is to recreate in clothes those qualities specific to the pictorial image, the ensemble of iconic traits which constitute the chosen work and characterise it as an aesthetic object. What differentiates an aesthetic from a "non-aesthetic" object is the formal aspects which have the ability to draw the receptive attention of an observer. A garment can hold the attention of an observer in a variety of ways: it may be striking in its practical character, it may attract through being cheap, or even through the *griffe*, or the name of the couturier. But when the object emphasizes an aesthetic function, it has been conceived so as to orientate reception through its formal character, its "eidos" on the materiality of which it is made. Whether it be the intention of the creator in the conception of his creation, or whether it be the attention which the work demands on the part of the observer, the

⁵ Haroldo de Campos. "Da Tradução como criação e como crítica" in: *Metalinguagem*: Petrópolis, Ed. Vozes, pp. 21-28. Also "Transluciferação mefistofáustica" in: *Marginália Fáustica: Deus e o Diabo no Fausto de Goethe*: São Paulo, Ed. Perspectiva, 1981. Col. Signos 9.

same selective activity is uppermost and leads to an approach to the object by way of the formal aspect by which it is defined.

To transcodify, transcribe, transcreate, transfer, transform, transfuse, transgress - verbs marked by the prefix *trans* indicate this operation of transit. In a semiotic context, this action is equivalent to a series of transformations with the ability to translate the semiosis of one language into another. Between the original and the work which results from the original, one finds aesthetic affinities made manifest by the way in which the aesthetic principles of the matrix work are recodified. The appropriation of these principles also aims to provoke, in like manner, the perceptive senses of the observer.

But instead of copying, some of the stylists studied here look back in time and incorporate the systems of their chosen painters so as to the diagram, the matrix of their works - but not as a model. In this sense, the diagram is a visual scheme for the interpretative activity. The translation encoded by the stylists is in this case the transcodification of the diagram of the original into another syntactic and semantic form. Like this, the original is not adulterated in that its "images" are maintained, made present in the new signifiers. By recreating the first signification in the system of fashion, the couturiers give it new validity in another code and also in another language.

Art is, and always has been, an infinite series of recreations of itself. Between painting and fashion, which prolongs painting in time, there is a concentration on the language, which is now reflected in the cut, the lines of the body, the use of colour, the use (or suppression) of detail, the garment-form which models the silhouette, and the silhouette itself. Here, fashion is far from being a copy of painting; it reinvents the aesthetic principles and the plastic vocabulary of painting and, in this way, transcodifies them into its own universe.

6. 2.1. Painting "à la Mode"

Through these processes of intersemiotic translation, fashion transforms painting (and painters) into a fashion. What fashion has to propose is a sort of game, with the long duration proper to art: once they are chosen to serve as paradigms of fashion, certain privileged painters themselves become the objects of a new vogue.

The choice of painters is in most cases restricted to those who are already recognized for their art. The same aesthetic principles, now available to a wider public - in our examples the aesthetic qualities of Art Nouveau, Geometrical Abstractionism, Constructivism, Abstract Expressionism - leave the universe of museum and gallery for exhibition in new context. Although the price of the clothes created limits the size of the consuming public, there is a great distance between seeing a certain type of dress in a boutique or a luxury clothes shop and seeing, in a museum, the fabrics which have given rise to such a dress. When we enter a museum, an art gallery, we know in advance the questions which will be put to us, and our aesthetic attention is called exactly because of the place. At a fashion parade, on the other hand, aesthetic attention is not prescribed - and yet it may be called, too.

In the examples of "mode-peinture" analysed here, the meaning of the sense qualities detached from their usual context seems to have the power to inspire in the ephemeral universe of fashion something of the character of eternity more commonly associated with art. The updating of the aesthetic paradigms from which fashion draws its inspiration for a short time in fact nourishes this fashion for the long time of eternity in art.

On the other hand, one sees how fashion aims at giving an individual characteristics which are external to him/her, with the objective intention of making him/her become the image of the other which he/she continually aspires to be. In these transformations of being, a person is led to dress his/her own plastic qualities - the body - with other plastic qualities. Thus it is the person's own forms which provide the support for the qualities destined for contemplation. To put it another way: the person contemplates himself/herself occupied in setting off the transformations available to the perceptions of others. He or she is the catalyst for the reception of the qualities transmitted.

If, on the one hand, there is an enlargement of sensibility, set off by the plastic qualities carried in the painting, on the other the painting, "painted" on the female body, is in essence the concretization of the desire to transform, to "become someone else", presupposed and fostered by fashion.

What is the underlying reason for this fashion? It establishes a new fashion, which in turn will be replaced by yet another; in this change, for a few instants, the person sees that his/her body is in itself an ensemble of plastic qualities, capable of

causing admiration as an aesthetic effect. For a few instants, its forms become "art" thanks to the fashion which exposes these forms as a painting, illuminated by the light of day and night - yet still in daily life, where the person lives. All of us, through our clothes, parade in the search to become ourselves here and now.

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