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1 The following explications are part of a larger project, the results of which will be published as *Fashioning Society, or, The Mode of Modernity: Observations on Fashion in Eighteenth Century Britain*. I thank the London College of Fashion and the 'Research Centre for Fashion, the Body and Material Culture' of the University of the Arts (London) for their generous hospitality and intellectual inspiration during my time as a Visiting Research Fellow. This specific text is based on a talk presented to members of the research centre.

2 In Roland Barthes' terms, the difference is one between encountering image-clothing and written clothing; cf. Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990 [1967], pp.3-4. Barthes, famously, decided to study only the written garment, believing, in true structuralist fashion, that (only) here the signifiers are completely without any "plastic quality" and therefore "entirely constituted with a view to a signification" (p.8). What Barthes ignores is the materiality of every representation as well as the phenomenology of mediation – I will try and address these shortcomings in this paper.

3 Georg Simmel, "Fashion", *International Quarterly* 10, 1904, pp.130-155.

4 Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England*, New Haven, London: Yale UP, 2005, p.254. Fashion-dolls and oil paintings share some of the features of printed representations, but they enable different practises.

5 Cf. Christoph Heyl, *A Passion for Privacy: Untersuchungen zur Genese der bürgerlichen Privatsphäre in London, 1660-1800*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004, pp.506-526.

The eighteenth century saw an unprecedented rise in all things printed, and more specifically, the emergence of two new genres: the novel and 'modern moral subjects', *ie* realistic satirical print-engravings. Both new genres, for reasons I cannot elaborate on here, appear to be obsessed with fashion.¹ The central aim of this paper is to analyse the difference(s) between looking at *pictorial depictions* of dressed individuals and reading *verbal descriptions* of these.² How does a reader/ beholder engage with (fictional) descriptions and depictions of dress? How do the representations present dress? While I will follow a phenomenological method, this phenomenological account is embedded in and determined by a specific, culturally and historically situated context. The thesis of this paper is that the double representation of fashion in mass-mediated, imaginative pictures and texts contributed decisively to the construction of fashion as a phenomenon that is – as Georg Simmel defined³ – simultaneously individualising and uniforming.

The Eighteenth Century Media Set-up, or, The Mirror in the Closet

Before I can analyse the difference between the two differing modes of representing and observing dress available to eighteenth century individuals, however, the difference both modes made in respect to earlier ways of learning about fashion has to be considered. Previous to the rise of printed descriptions/depictions, there was, as Aileen Ribeiro has argued, "no substitute for observing in the flesh, what fashionable people wore".⁴ So what is the difference between observing someone 'in the flesh' or with the help of print? What difference is there between presentation and mass-media representation? What practices do both new print-media enable?

Firstly, the paradigmatic observer emerging in the eighteenth century is a *solitary* one: s/he is no longer part of an event or even an audience – experiencing collectively in the street or in the theatre – but sitting alone in a private closet, itself a brand new feature of post-Fire London's domestic architecture.⁵ Printed accounts, in opposition

6 This, of course, has already been highlighted by Walter Benjamin in "The Storyteller", *Illuminations*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970 [1955], pp.83-109, p.87: "What distinguishes the novel from the story... is its essential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing... The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual... In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence to the profound complexity of the living."

7 Rose A. Zimbaro, "Imitation to Emulation: 'Imitation of Nature' from the Restoration to the Eighteenth Century", *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 2:2, pp.2-9, p.8.

8 J. Paul Hunter, "The World as Stage and Closet", *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, Ed. Shirley Strum Kenny, Washington et al: Folger, 1984, pp.271-287, p.285.

9 Cf. Lambert Wiesing, *Das Mich der Wahrnehmung. Eine Autopsie*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009.

to personal interaction or direct perception, make the physical, corporeal co-presence of observer and observed unnecessary; novel reading, as much as looking at an engraving, becomes a quiet, solitary, almost anti-social activity.⁶ "The reader can open the door of a novel, enter, and quietly shut the door behind him".⁷ While printed representations allow looking at others *not* present as *if* present, the looked-at persons cannot look back: the reader enters the story/tableaux alone, quietly and unnoticed. When reading a book or looking at a picture the gaze becomes unidirectional, non-reciprocal: the reader/ beholder sees without being seen. (If the beholder should think a painted person stares (back) at her/him, the experience becomes eerie, unnatural.)

Secondly, the reader is *alone* and *not alone* at the same time: "A thousand readers indeed stare, from their closets, into a single mirror of print, and each of them does it alone".⁸ A *printed* representation does not only allow a distancing from the object of observation and a retreat from society, it also provides reassurance that the individual gaze is multiple, that – at least potentially – many are looking at the same image individually. Here, *mass printed* novels and engravings differ greatly from stories and images as such.

Thirdly, the object of representation presents itself to the *eyes only*: prints are not consumed through the ear or the mouth; and while the medium of print can be touched, the object of representation remains ungraspable. Looking at prints means to see, and to see only, without being seen.⁹ What's more, the represented object is arrested; one can stare at the representation for as long as one wants, and as often as one wants: it cannot go away – like a sound or smell and, surely, a real person might do.

As a consequence, readers of novels as well as beholders of print-engravings can do what they would do on the street and 'in the flesh', *ie* look for the latest fashions, but with the enormous advantages that a) this time the process of perception and observation is guaranteed to be unidirectional, b) the objects stand still, and c) s/he knows that others (potentially) observe what s/he observes. For the first time, representative, *ie* mass-mediated fashions could be closely observed and meticulously studied. That the representations are fictional does matter little: the mass media construct their own reality.

10 For further early visualisations (fans, waxworks, prints, illustrations), see *The Pamela Controversy: Criticisms and Adaptations of Samuel Richardson's Pamela, 1740–50*, vol.2: *Prose Criticism and Visual Representations*, Ed. Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001.

Fig 1 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, or, *Virtue Rewarded*, 6th ed., vol.1, 1742, p.123.

Reading, Looking, and the Perspective of Fashion

But *what* is it that is being presented to the eighteenth century consumer of printed texts and images? Let me start with an example where the same object appears to exist in two different representations. In response to Samuel Richardson's bestseller *Pamela* (1740) – one of the most popular print products of the eighteenth century and still famous today for its detailed use of dress – a whole range of prints were published that depicted 'Pamela' in various scenes described in the book. The first episode ever to be depicted was the 'bundles scene', the most pivotal moment in Pamela's sartorial career, the moment she ponders whether to leave Mr B or not; unfortunately, the original print – commissioned by Richardson himself for the second edition – has not survived. The sixth edition of *Pamela*, however, incorporated twenty-nine engravings by Hubert Gravelot and Francis Hayman, once again giving the reader a picture of the central scenes of the book (figure 1).¹⁰



VIRTUE *Rewarded.* 123

WELL, let me see; ay, here is a Cotton Handkerchief I bought of the Pedlar; there should be another somewhere. O here it is! and here too are my new-bought knit Mittens: And here too is my new Flanel Coat, the fellow to that I have on. And in this Parcel pinn'd together, are several Pieces of printed Calico, Remnants of Silks, and such-like, that, if good Luck should happen, and I should get Work, would serve for Ribings and Facings, and such-like Uses. And here too are a Pair of Pocket-knives; they are too fine for me; but I have no worfe. Bless me! said I, I did not think I had so many good Things!

WELL, Mrs. *Jervis*, said I, you have seen all my Store, and I will now sit down, and tell you a Piece of my Mind.

Be brief, then, said she, my good Girl; for she was afraid, she said afterwards, that I should say too much.

WHY then the Cafe is this: I am to enter upon a Point of Equity and Conscience, Mrs. *Jervis*; and I must beg, if you love me, you'd let me have my own Way. Those things there of my Lady's, I can have no Claim to, so as to take them away; for she gave them me, supposing I was to wear them in her Service, and to do Credit to her bountiful Heart. But since I am to be turn'd away, you know, I cannot wear them at my poor Father's; for I should bring all the little Village upon my Back: and so I resolve not to have *them*.

THEN,

Fig 1



← Fig 2 Louis Truchy, *Pamela*, 1745, plate 2: "Mr B expostulating ..."

11 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, or, *Virtue Rewarded*, 1740, Ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, Boston et al: Houghton Mifflin, 1971, pp.30-31.

12 Cf. Anne Buck, "Pamela's Clothes", *Costume* 26, 1992, pp.21-31.

On the right we read: "Well, let me see; ay, here is a Cotton Handkerchief I bought of the Pedlar; there should be another somewhere. O here it is! and here too are my new-bought knit Mittens: And this is my new Flanel Coat, the fellow to that I have on." On the left we see a depiction of the scene Pamela describes in here diary. But what exactly is the relation between description and depiction? Are they showing the same, or something different?

Another example is an engraving by Louis Truchy, which was based on a painting by Joseph Highmore and widely distributed. The image, again, gives a pretty realistic depiction of a scene from the book, where, as the caption underneath the picture reads, "Mr B [is] expostulating with Pamela in the Summer house after some liberties taken; Mrs Jervis (who is seen through the Window) having just before left her" (figure 2).

As the costume historian Anne Buck has rightly pointed out, in the portrait Pamela wears the clothes given to her by her master out of the wardrobe of his late mother, Pamela's former mistress. In the text the reader learns about these items of clothing: "My Master ... has given me a Suit of my old Lady's Cloaths, and half a Dozen of her Shifts, and Six fine Handkerchiefs, and three of her Cambrick Aprons, and four Holland ones ... he gave me Two Suits of fine *Flanders* lac'd Headcloths, Three Pair of fine Silk Shoes, two hardly the worse, and just fit for me; ... and several Ribbands and Topknots of all Colours, and Four Pair of fine white Cotton Stockens, and Three Pair of fine Silk ones; and Two Pair of rich Stays, and a Pair of rich Silver Buckles in one Pair of the Shoes."¹¹ In the picture, she is indeed wearing a silk gown and petticoat, with linen shift, cap, handkerchief and apron.¹² Is this, then, the same object, realistically described in two different media? Do both representations simply refer to the same object? Is the picture a mere visualisation?

A Question of Detail?

In order to distinguish between verbal and pictorial representations, the epistemologist Fred Dretske distinguishes between an analogue and a digital form of perception. To explain this distinction, he compares the sentence 'There is coffee in the glass' to a picture of such a glass: "In the verbal utterance the specific information is conveyed that there is coffee in the glass." Dretske calls this kind of information

13 Markus Wild, "Begrifflicher und nichtbegrifflicher Gehalt der Wahrnehmung", in: *Poetiken der Materie: Stoffe und ihre Qualitäten in Literatur, Kunst und Philosophie*, Ed. Thomas Strässle and Caroline Torra-Mattenkott (Freiburg i. Br., Berlin: Rombach, 2005), pp.245-262, p.256; my translation.

14 Wild, "Begrifflicher und nichtbegrifflicher Gehalt der Wahrnehmung", p.256; my translation.

15 Ellen J. Esrock, *The Reader's Eye: Visual Imaging as Reader Response*, Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994, p.192.

16 Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991, p.51.

'digital'. "In the second case there is a great amount of additional unspecified information (the form of the glass, its position on the table, the colour of the coffee, etc). The conveying of additional information is analogue."¹³ One might understand this distinction in terms of the amount of information 'conveyed': "The analogue form corresponds to the richness of the content of perceptions. The way something looks (gestalt, direction, size, tone) has analogue content."¹⁴ Comparing the depiction of Pamela's dress with its verbal description, one cannot deny that the image is more detailed: the written text can never trace every single fold of the dress. All that the text does is *name* the objects concerned. What is missing in the text is a detailed description of the object, which would conjure up the various and specific qualities of the dress in question. In this sense, the picture is much 'richer', much more detailed than the written equivalent – other than the clothes of the text the pictured dress could indeed be followed as a fashion.

Visualisation

But are the two representations, as image and as text, then, really that different? An analytical comparison like Dretske's misses the fact that reading is much more than the decoding of encoded digital information. Imaginative visualisation, as a number of recent studies have emphasized, is a key element of reading: "one can elaborate upon textual descriptions, producing visual details not mentioned explicitly by the text, as a means of sharpening one's cognitive grasp of the fictional world."¹⁵ Most readers could easily construct a whole from the parts presented. But how does an eighteenth century reader create Pamela's dress in front of her/his mind's eye, using the little information the book provides? The "law of primary importance in the phenomenology of reading", Marie-Laure Ryan claims, is the "principle of minimal departure": "This law ... states that we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe ... as confirming as far as possible to our representations of [the actual world]. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text."¹⁶

The contemporary reader of *Pamela* can be expected to have some kind of former, personal experience with a 'silk gown and petticoat' – especially because this was the *fashion* of the day. It is the fact that this novel deals with fashion,

ie a (potentially) *shared* knowledge, which enables the reader to *see*. Before the mind's eye, the image of Pamela's dress will be just as detailed, if not even more so, as in Truchy's print – it can even have a back. Through the words of the novel, the reader can clearly see Pamela's dress – because s/he has seen it before. However, this image of Pamela's dress remains an individualised one – one that belongs to the one imagining it. One that has, at least potentially, more emotions attached to it than a distanced picture. Maybe this fashion cannot be easily followed, but it can be individually loved.

From which Perspective?

How similar, or different, then, are these two images, the painting and the reader's visualisation? Let us go back to the picture and the book. In the novel we read: "he gave me Two Suits of fine Flanders lac'd Headcloths, Three Pair of fine Silk Shoes, two hardly the worse, and just fit for me". Now compare this again to the pictorial depiction (figure 2). In one instance we are looking *at* Pamela, in the other we are looking *with* Pamela, through her eyes. In one instance we are looking, with Pamela, at her wardrobe, and in the other we are looking at Pamela wearing these clothes. In one instance we learn about the subjective relation Pamela has to her clothes: they are given to her, she thinks they fit her. In the other we (just) see her being pretty; the situation is presented as factual evidence, something that is just there and does not have to be shaped by subjective approaches. In the written version, however, things exist foremost in relation to the observer: the reader is forced to evaluate this relation as it cannot be his/her own – or adopt Pamela's personal stance and thereby form a close relation to the presented dress. But can we not love a pictured dress as well?

The Image of Fashion Suspended between Distance and Closeness

The image the reader forms in his/her mind is always already tinged by his/her own memories of dress s/he employs in the process of visualisation. While the text, therefore, enables and demands individual appropriation, the picture, it seems,

17 Susanne Lüdemann, "Beobachtungsverhältnisse. Zur (Kunst-)Geschichte der Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung", in: *Widerstände der Systemtheorie: Kulturtheoretische Analysen zum Werk von Niklas Luhmann*, Ed. Albrecht Koschorke and Cornelia Vismann, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999, pp.63-75, p.66; my translation.

18 Cf. Frédéric Ogée and Olivier Meslay, "William Hogarth and Modernity", in: Mark Hallet and Christine Riding, *Hogarth*, London: Tate, 2006, pp.23-29, p.27.

19 See further Hogarth's critique of the false use of perspective in *Frontispiece: Satire on False Perspective*, 1754; cf. Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, vol.3: *Art and Politics, 1750-64* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1993), p.61. Hogarth himself, however, as Paulson emphasizes, often 'bends' the rules of perspective for comic effect.

provides a full image, devoid of any subjective colourings. Famous for such a disembodied, abstract, universal observer is the so-called linear perspective. Rather than (re)experiencing the action through the eyes of one of those who are part of it, the observer of a picture (usually) remains safely removed from the image – s/he sees the action from no specific angle and consequently is less forced to take a stance.

The observer position that recent studies of the scopic regime of the eighteenth century have ascribed to linear perspective as such is based on distancing: it gives "the observer the illusion he could see without being involved, that he could see, without being seen, without changing the observed through observing and without himself being changed by the act of observing: the subject that sees by means of linear perspective installs itself behind the window of a 'peep-show'... , in the position of a secret, for himself and others invisible voyeur. Consequently, he is an empirical subject only in a very limited sense. While he is in the world in the emphatic sense that the things of the world organize themselves according to his perspective (the things in the world appear before and for his gaze); he is at the same time distanced from the world by this very act."¹⁷

Whereas the observed are turned into actors in a 'peep-show', whose *act* can be 'discovered',¹⁸ the observer is removed from the scene. While everything else is revealed as staged, as governed by cultural conventions, the very act that apparently discovers these acts is staged as 'natural', not governed by conventions or subjective preferences, but *realistic*. The realistic mode is indeed that mode of representation where we see closely, and only see, without being seen, as an individual part of a mass: the image is the same for everyone – just like fashion. But how, then, can everybody love it? How, then, can this distance be overcome?

From a Peculiar Half-Distance

Hogarth, the epitomical print-engraver of his time, was a master of perspective;¹⁹ he, however, gives a specific, modern interpretation to it: one that enables to observe fashion. When Hogarth depicts a mass gathering of a wild mob, and positions the observer almost in the midst of the spectacle, the distance between observer and observed – almost paradoxically – remains intact, as in his depiction of *Southwark Fair* (figure 3).



Fig 3

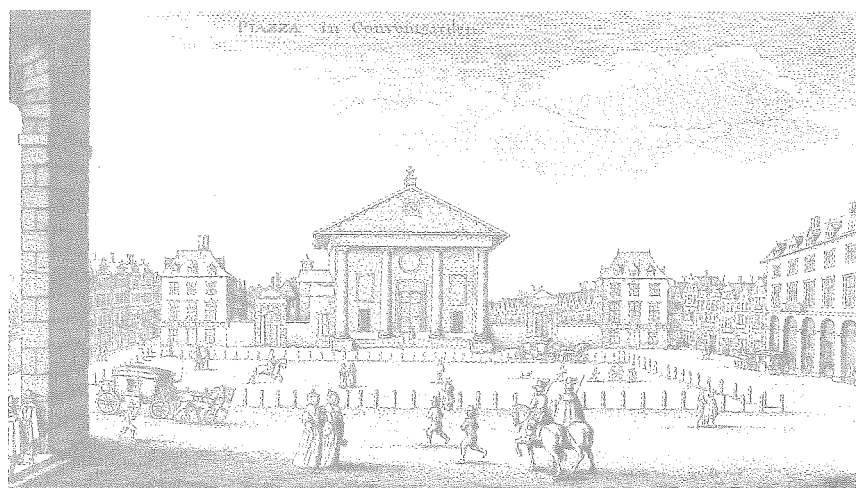


Fig 4

Fig 3 Hogarth, *Southwark Fair*, 1733.

Fig 4 Wenceslaus Hollar, *Piazza in Conventgarden*, c. 1647.

20 Mark Hallet, *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth*, New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1999, p.179.

21 Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000, p.59.

Hogarth comes markedly closer to the observed individuals than his predecessors. Wenceslaus Hollar's depiction of Covent Garden a century earlier, for example, usually a crowded place, presents the 'laundered'²⁰ site from a safe distance, reducing the depicted figures to indecipherable figurines (figure 4).

But although Hogarth turns the generic figurines into life-like figures, although he comes decisively closer, he still keeps his distance. An imaginary 'pit' between audience and performers seems to guarantee the finely observed distinction between the observer's world and that of the visitors of the fair, who, curiously, do not seem to detect the close observer. On (nearly) all of Hogarth's engravings of groups of people, the first row starts well clear of the frame of the picture; usually we see the depicted people from head to toe, giving the impression that they must be at least a couple of yards away from the observer – who is close enough to 'discover' those seen, but suddenly removed enough to remain 'uncovered'. Such a 'close, yet distanced' observer position, finally, seems to be the peculiar feature of Richardson's novel and Hogarth's prints alike: in both instances one can 'participate voyeuristically';²¹ one can have a close, personal look at those things people love – without being seen. Participating closely and peeping from a distance, consequently, are not restricted to either word or picture, but peculiar modes of representation and observation. Fashion, within this media set-up, can, at the same time, be something that is a distanced phenomenon of the mass, something that has to be followed; and something that appeals affectively to individual preferences. Print enables us to love (our own version of) what others (apparently) love: and that is what fashion is all about.

Satire and its Discontents

Reading Images and Staring at Texts

However, as we all know, the possibilities of an imaginative appropriation did not appeal to all – fashion, after all, was a thorn in the sides of many. I began by stating that the pictorial image is, in one way, much richer in detail than the written

22 For the intertextuality and intermediality of Hogarth's prints, see Peter Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts. From Swift to the French Revolution*, London: Reaktion Books, 1995, pp.101-137.

23 Cf. Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts*, pp.112-113.

24 Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts*, pp.26-28.

25 [Charles Lamb], "On the Genius and Character of Hogarth", *The Reflector* III, 1811, pp.61-77, p.62.

equivalent. However, this greater richness in detail could also mean a greater ambivalence. A large part of visual depictions of dress in the eighteenth century tried to command an authority over its objects that run counter to any form of ambiguity. Depictions of fashions, therefore, often ventured towards the grotesque, presenting monstrous fashions and their hideous consequences (figure 5).

Such images do not only (re-)present an object, they also prescribe *how* to see it. They present a realistic situation where a specific kind of transgressive fashion creates a 'problem'. The suggested solution is obvious: to discard such hideous fashions. However, the problem with this kind of coercing is equally obvious: while the general situation is depicted realistically, thereby creating a common ground between the depicted world and the world of the beholder, the central object of the satire, the dress, seems to depart from this common ground. The problem, therefore, becomes an 'otherworldly' problem: this is not the problem of the beholder, not 'my' problem, not 'my' kind of fashion. By making individual appropriation impossible, the picture cannot show, and consequently cannot criticize fashion – but only a caricature of it.

The Dangers of Realism and the Powers of Presence
Hogarth, as we know, took another path. He despised caricatures and aimed at realistic depictions (figure 6).

Hogarth's picture is definitely not a caricature, nor a mere, ambivalent 'snapshot', but a carefully constructed ensemble of iconologic / iconographic signs, continuously referring to various other texts and images,²² which can be precisely 'read' by a literate and educated audience (of connoisseurs). By interpreting the symbols surrounding the girl in the picture one already *figures* out her future: the old testament scenes on paintings hanging on the wall, the monkey wearing the same headdress, the broken china, the mask, the mirror, *etc*²³ – everything, here, stands for something else: "Meaning becomes a matter of recognizing the allusions to texts and contexts... The reader [sic] uses them to create some sort of meaning within the larger coordinates set by the satirical genre".²⁴ In order to follow this coordinates the image has to be read with attention to minute details; in this case, the image would be 'digital'. Charles Lamb's famous appreciation of Hogarth's prints seems to observe these rules



Fig 5

Fig 5 John June, 'The Review',
c. 1760.

Fig 6 Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*,
1732, plate 2 →

of engagement: "His graphic representations are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of *words*. Other pictures we look at, – his prints we read."²⁵ Or so Lamb – and those hoping to distance fashion – might have hoped.

However, criticism of one of Hogarth's prints (*The March to Finchley*) in the contemporary magazine *The Midwife, or the Old Woman's Magazine*, hints in another direction, highlighting the 'fruitfulness' of words over their 'suggestiveness': "Its first and greatest Fault then is, its being too new, and having too great a Resemblance to the Objects it represents; if this appears a Paradox, you ought to take particular care of confessing it: This Picture has yet too much of that Lustre, of that despicable Freshness which we discover in Nature, and which is never seen in the celebrated Cabinets of the Curious." (No. 4, 1750–51, p.182) Here, the verisimilitude of Hogarth's depictions of contemporary life becomes a problem. Hogarth's advantage over earlier satires, namely that the target of the satire is 'worldly', and therefore more easily recognizable, simultaneously gives rise to its greatest danger. "This painter", *The Midwife* continues, "is remarkable for a particular Sagacity in seizing a Thousand little Circumstances which escape the



26 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York: Fordham UP, 2005 [2003], p.11.

27 Vertue Note Books, vol.3 (The Twenty-Second Volume of the Walpole Society 1933-1934), Oxford: OUP, 1934, p.58. Cf. Christine Riding, "The Harlot and the Rake", in: Mark Hallet and Christine Riding, *Hogarth*, London: Tate, 2006, pp.73-75; Hallet, *The Spectacle of Difference*, pp.100-101.

Observation of the greatest Part of the Spectators" (ibid, p.183). Unlike earlier, purely symbolic depictions, Hogarth's picture goes beyond its semiotic (iconographic / iconological) content: there is always more to see – as every fold of the dress is depicted, there are new desires hidden in each of these folds.

There is more to the image than semiotic content, it contains elements that might be "nonsignifying but not insignificant".²⁶ Besides everything else, the pictured dress can easily be perceived as adorable and desirable, demanding to be seen and adored – counteracting the carefully constructed meanings surrounding it. The (painted) dress literally outshines its environment in its corporeality – the carefully constructed narrative, the structural oppositions, genre conventions, the symbolic ensembles, everything is pushed into the dark background by the sheer presence of the dress. Here, the 'analogue' displaces the 'digital'. (Which is not to say that the desirability of the dress is not a culturally constructed convention – it is just not experienced as being so.)

Contemporary spectators seemed to experience this presence. According to George Vertue's notebook, the "whore's desabbille careless and a pretty Countenance & air" were especially admired by visitors: "this thought pleasd many". "[P]ersons of fashion and Artists" alike came to Hogarth's studio in order to see the pictures, or rather, what could be seen on them: "he painted so naturally... that it drew every body to see them".²⁷ Instead of being part of a carefully constructed moral, the dress becomes a straightforward object of desire – and maybe even more desirable than it could ever be in reality, where the lighting is never right, and the smell is terrible, where the right moment never comes, and where those looked at might not even want to be looked at.

Conclusion

Fashion between Text and Image, Appropriation and Representation

Text or pictures of the here and now of fashion meet the observer with a double intensity: they are not only representations of a distanced object, but openings into the presented *tableaux vivants*, an invitation, an offer, or even a demand to cross the threshold, the frame, into another

reality that is in-transparent and unreachable in 'real life'. "The image", the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy argues, "throws in my face an intimacy that reaches me in the midst of intimacy – through sight, through hearing, or through the very meaning of words."²⁸ Like fashion, the image is at the same time everywhere *and* here and now, with the mass and with me individually. Fashion, therefore, needs both, the distancing and the appropriative effect, it has to be both a mass phenomenon and individually adored; fashion, therefore, needs both textuality (of text or picture) and visuality (of text or picture), both representation and presentation.

Mass-mediated prints allow to see on one's own – and to see only, and without being seen – what others want to see and potentially do see at the same time. When the object of prints is dress, the reason for such individual gaze on a mass product becomes apparent: we only want a dress, if others want it, but we still want it for ourselves. The mass mediated image allows an individual experience, an appropriation of a common desire. Print allows us to retreat from society and indulge in pleasures disapproved of by and in society: we can love what everybody loves without revealing this love. However, whether we read an image, or stare at a text, whether we see the signs or become affected by the presence of the object, this always depends on the specific personal, media and cultural context in which the meeting between individual, medium and object takes place: this encounter can neither be predetermined by the medium nor voluntarily controlled by the individual, but has to be negotiated again and again.

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