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How can Everyday Aesthetics meet fashion?

Abstract

Amongst recent theoretical efforts to achieve the academic “addressability” of widespread phenomena that bring to the fore the etymological poignancy of the term “aisthesis”, Everyday Aesthetics seems emblematic for a richer reconceptualization of aesthetics. It, in fact, deals with features of our daily life traditionally overlooked by art-centred aesthetics, due to their “mundane” nature. Yet fashion, indeed a crucial element in the everyday, has curiously played a secondary, or rather, no role in such investigation. This paper aims to compensate this neglect by highlighting a normative feature of the aesthetic linked to its anthropological root and to prove how, if put to the test of everydayness through the lens of aestheticization and intersubjectivity, fashion and the aesthetic can be equated.

Keywords

Everyday Aesthetics, Fashion, Aestheticization

1. Fashion as an issue for aesthetics

It would be misleading to say that contemporary philosophy has not dealt with fashion at all: how not to mention, in fact, the fundamental research carried out, after Baudelaire with his *Le peintre de la vie moderne* and various authors who worked between philosophy and other disciplines during the nineteenth century, by Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Eugen Fink, to name a few amongst the most prominent figures in this field. Moreover, in recent years several volumes and articles that have addressed the question of fashion from heterogeneous philosophical points of view have also been published. Amongst the most important ones: Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in dreams. Fashion and modernity* (1985), Karen Hanson's *Dressing down dressing up. The philosophic fear of fashion* (1990), Ulrich Lehmann's *Tigersprung. Fashion in modernity* (2000), Yves Michaud's

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L'art a l'état gazeux. Essai sur le triomphe de l'esthétique (2003), Lars Svendsen's *Fashion. A philosophy* (2004), the volume edited by Jessica Wolfendale and Jeanette Kennett *Fashion. Philosophy for everyone: thinking with style* (2011), the volume edited by Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marino *Philosophical perspectives on fashion* (2016)² and Ian King's *The aesthetics of dress* (2017)³.

However, the recognition of fashion's dignity as a philosophical and specifically aesthetic research topic seems to imply the necessity for a broadening of the domain of aesthetics itself, for it traditionally follows an art-centred and/or nature-centred paradigm of investigation. This need, furthermore, is not only related to fashion, but involves several dimensions of non-artistic and non-natural experience in which today the aesthetic plays a key role, such as design in its various configurations, gastronomy, leisure activities, sport, tourism, wellness, well-being practices and the like⁴.

Recently, we have been witnessing various theoretical attempts to achieve the academic "addressability" of widespread quotidian devices and practices, that straightforwardly bring to the fore the etymological poignancy of the term *aisthesis* – which equally involves sensitive and cognitive aspects of human experience – for they constantly and crucially participate (if not allow) on a daily basis to both the development of our taste and of our understanding of the surrounding environments. Amongst these theoretical efforts Everyday Aesthetics (EA) emerges as both emblematical and promising for the design of a richer reconceptualization of aesthetics. As opposed to traditional fine art-oriented aesthetics that has so far dominated debates in philosophical aesthetics, EA is, in fact, a novel line of research originally developed mainly in Scandinavian and American academic frameworks, but currently debated internationally, which deals with several features of our everyday life that have hitherto been neglected, due to their "too mundane" nature. It would then be reasonably

² This volume is particularly worth mentioning also because it offers the possibility to consult an extremely wide and rich bibliography dedicated to fashion.

³ Noteworthy is also Marquez (2010), a shorter contribution dedicated to fashion in the field of philosophical handbooks.

⁴ Nevertheless, the risk that has often been emphasized by some scholars is that of an inconsiderate inclusivism, raising the question of the criteria that would make a phenomenon aesthetically relevant. This question, though, will not be widely addressed in this contribution, but only mentioned as functional to the development of some passages of this paper.

expected to find fashion, which is undoubtedly a crucial element in the everyday, in the range of topics towards which EA pays theoretical attention. And yet not only fashion, but the more general topic of the significance of human appearances, has curiously played a rhapsodic, or rather no role, in such investigation. Hence, at least in this case, EA seems to contradict its essential goal to recognize “philosophical dignity” to traditionally overlooked, although aesthetically relevant, topics.

The underlying thesis of this paper is precisely that fashion should be one of EA’s key topics. A first “empirical” reason for this is the acknowledgment of the fact that most of everyday life’s contents are determined today by objects and devices produced and enjoyed in accordance with the laws of fashion; and to the extent that EA is committed to give an account of the aesthetic dimension of the everyday, dealing with this issue becomes inevitable for it. A second “theoretical” reason is that fashion, in shaping everyday experience, emphasizes specific structures of the latter that cannot be neglected from a purely aesthetic point of view, since they indeed result in a very particular configuration of the aesthetic in everyday life; therefore, EA could draw important insights from the analysis of fashion. But why hasn’t this happened yet? The fact that so far EA has neglected this topic could be due to a more general theoretical deficit. This essay wants to address precisely these theoretical obstacles.

To this end we will follow an articulated path, starting from a (negative) stance expressed by Ossi Naukkarinen. This stance has the advantage of highlighting the fact that the reluctance to acknowledge the bearing of fashion on the analysis of the aesthetic is due to a particular conception of the latter. The question concerns some typical characters of fashion that are traditionally considered foreign to the aesthetic (not by chance, rival strategies as those pursued by semiotics and cultural studies have focused on them). But today it does not seem possible to separate these characters from the everyday experience of the aesthetic. In this paper we will try to understand how EA is able to assimilate these elements into its own theoretical program, according to recent critical perspectives emerged within it. Thus amended, EA could then find in fashion its own matrix for the analysis of the everyday reality of the aesthetic.

2. *Can fashion and the aesthetic be equated?*

It has been about over two decades since EA begun its path towards its recent academic institutionalization⁵. In the framework of the growing literature produced by this relatively new-born branch of aesthetics, only one case is openly dedicated to the study of human appearance⁶. In fact, in Naukkarinen (1998) the latter is meant as the main issue of an “aesthetics of the unavoidable” (precisely as the title of Naukkarinen’s book⁷ suggests), that in general deals with those

things that are not art works, that form the major part of our everyday world, and that force us to pay attention to them just by existing around us so voluminously – advertisements, cars, hairdos, clothes, other people, household utensils, credit cards, eye glasses, cd players, computers, shoes, pencils, neon lights, wallets, lighters, beer bottles, traffic lights and so on. (Naukkarinen 1998: 12)

Nevertheless, in Naukkarinen’s research the links to fashion, which are indeed inevitable in the analysis of the ways through which

⁵ For a wider analysis of EA’s process of institutionalization see Iannilli (2016).

⁶ It must be said, though, that also Leddy (2012) spends a few words on fashion when including the latter among the interests of the so-called *flâneur*. More importantly, when dealing with “the tasteful”, which is listed in his “bestiary of aesthetic terms for everyday contexts”, he maintains that “the aesthetics of the tasteful is closely associated with the aesthetics of fashion” (Leddy 2012: 166). He also seems to associate the question of connoisseurship to some of the tasks required in the fashion industry, as, for instance, that of being able to evaluate beauty when choosing a model in/for a specific context (Leddy 2012: 193). On the other hand, Saito (2007) deals with the issue of personal appearance for instance when she addresses the question of everyday aesthetic qualities in the light of the law of transience or when explaining her understanding of what she defines “moral-aesthetic judgments”. It is also noteworthy that Saito mentions the question of judgments “based on appearances” (or tension between moral and aesthetic judgments) as one of the ways through which the fundamental problem of the so-called “tension in Everyday Aesthetics” can be illustrated: “Although not judging a person by his cover is a wise cautionary reminder, it would be strange for everyday aesthetics to discredit this all-too-familiar ‘judgment by cover’ experience. This common experience should be taken as is and should be subjected to its own analysis, including the cautionary warning” (Saito 2007: 246). These, in fact, are also important questions that concern fashion in general.

⁷ This work can be considered one of the pioneering approaches to EA, although Naukkarinen in this context prefers to label the field of his inquiry as “aesthetics of non-art”, rather than “aesthetics of everyday life” (1998: 64-7).

individuals appear, are marginal as respects to the whole research, by the author's own admission.

In this context the following statement is particularly important:

it is clear that fashion is expressly an economic phenomenon in which things are made fashionable [...] because producers understandably want to sell their products. Aesthetics, in turn, is not economics. And still further, fashion and clothing styles more generally often have to do with how people show that they are "members" of a particular group, or more generally how they use their appearances as signs. Semiotic features of appearance are not necessarily aesthetic, however [...]. All in all, fashion incorporates many aspects other than aesthetic ones, and thus [...] *fashion and the aesthetic cannot be equated*. (Naukkarinen 1998: 68)

This clear claim provides a good starting point for the present analysis precisely because it seems not fully satisfactory, especially if we consider our current life-conditions. Today, in fact, it is very difficult to maintain that there is a sharp separation between the aesthetic and both the economic and (as we will see later) the semiotic. First of all, a feature that at this point in time is absolutely ascribable to contemporaneity is its being strongly aestheticized, that is to say, governed by a set of principles which no longer have a strictly moral, political or religious foundation, but that are instead chiefly determined by considerations of an aesthetic kind, which then set the pace of today's individual and social dynamics.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that aestheticization is chiefly an economic strategy, that as such patently exploits aesthetic factors and components. The aestheticization degree of something not only is directly proportional to its "saleability", but thanks to aestheticization what is already "saleable" becomes even more "saleable". Nowadays, as in-built obsolescence of objects is a matter of fact, what is increasingly becoming urgent is the "need for replacement [in terms of] aesthetically styled products" (Welsch 1996: 3). By the way, it must be noted that commodification processes and consumerism are further topics which haven't received adequate attention by EA: the latter, in fact, indirectly deals with them by contrasting them mainly through the (yet necessary) socio-ethical oriented promotion of a sustainable way of life or of better life conditions⁸.

⁸ Examples of this approach are provided, for instance, by the works of Yuriko Saito, Sherri Irvin, and Glenn Parsons.

Anyways, only by looking around us, in urban, working, domestic, leisure-related, real or virtual⁹ environments, well, basically anywhere nowadays, we will recognize and acknowledge how the choices we make everyday, just like everyone else's, are often principally guided by aesthetic criteria, and thus that they are indeed manifestations, or better, expressive and not necessarily propositional deictics of a specific taste preference¹⁰, which, as such, is in principle shareable and therefore active in a strongly intersubjective dimension. And it is precisely in this sense that we can speak of the aesthetic as an intrinsically relational concept.

Then it is quite clear that our current reality is extremely permeated with aesthetic features, although they are mixed with other levels of experience that are not usually considered philosophically pregnant. Hence it would be "irresponsible" for EA to keep ignoring such aesthetically entrenched and wide-spread context, "responsibility" meant here as the ability to respond to specific situations.

3. Alternative directions: the aesthetic deficit of semiotics and cultural studies

In order to understand this point, we can make a comparison with other traditions that, before the birth of EA, showed an interest in everyday experience. Everyday-related issues have received extensive attention by lines of research emerged thanks to the pioneering contribution that both French semiotic tradition and British cultural studies tradition have indeed provided for the development of the studies on the everyday. These traditions share with EA an interest towards the latter, but at the same time several authors who belong to these research fields have dealt exactly with those topics which EA has hitherto neglected, namely commodification processes, consumerism and fashion.

⁹ Let's think how important is the selection and sharing of specific contents on social media, that surely provide a certain image of us.

¹⁰ One instance of this conception of "aesthetic judgment" is provided by Ludwig Wittgenstein: "What are expressions of liking something? Is it only what we say or interjections we use or faces we make? Obviously not. It is, often, how often I read something or how often I wear a suit. Perhaps I won't even say: 'It's fine', but wear it often and look at it" (Wittgenstein 1967: 12).

However, although these further investigations on the everyday played and certainly still play a relevant role within the thematic area under discussion here, since they recognized the conceptual fruitfulness of certain matters for the understanding of the dynamics which connote everyday life (starting from fashion), they have not contributed to make emerge the specifically aesthetic quality of the everyday in the light of these current and crucial phenomena. At the end of the day, French semiotic and British cultural studies traditions have always provided a mainly linguistic, sociological, political and literary kind of interpretation¹¹. All this is absolutely understandable, for aesthetics is not the specific disciplinary field they belong to. Yet, what is particularly striking here is the fact that however the terms “aesthetic” and “aesthetics” often recur in these writings. And this may be a further symptom, I believe, of a certain cruciality that such concepts have for the explanation of everyday life processes¹². The French semiotic tradition specifically, at least from its foundational period that could be said to coincide with Roland Barthes’ early writings, until Baudrillard’s investigations, has analysed those aspects of the everyday linked to fashion from the point of view of the *autonomous* logic of signs¹³. A logic which, being the aesthetic as aforementioned an essentially *relational* concept, can only be inadequate for the clarification of its contemporary dynamics.

4. A double emendation and four conceptual clusters

Such preliminary considerations should allow us to begin the “confutation” of Naukkarinen’s assertion, who nevertheless has the merit of having emphasized how the analysis of human interactions, which are “unavoidably” based on appearances (and to which fashion is undoubtedly related), greatly contributes to the better understanding of

¹¹ In this regard, Felski (2005: 28-43) is emblematical. Here, in fact, the relationship that exists between aesthetics and cultural studies is investigated through an exclusive focus on the case of literature.

¹² These terms are widely employed, for instance, in Barthes (2006), in Baudrillard (1981), in Highmore (2001), and in Storey (2014).

¹³ Probably thanks to the suggestions derived from these semiotic studies, French culture has also faced an important debate on the question of fashion connoted by a stronger orientation towards social and sociological issues, as in the cases of Bourdieu, Yonnet, Maffesoli, and Lipovetsky.

what the term “aesthetic” means today, everyday. As a matter of fact, those reasons that Naukkarinen points out to support his argument concerning the impossibility to equate fashion and the aesthetic actually corroborate the opposite. What is being argued here is not that economics or semiotics are per se the interpretative keys that would allow such equation. Rather, the focal point of the present contribution is precisely that we should reconsider economics and semiotics according to their current interrelation with the aesthetic dimension, so that they could give us some useful hints in order to suggest that fashion and the aesthetic can be equated in “everyday mode”.

First, we need to understand “economics” in terms of “aestheticization” which, due to its multifaceted nature, has been interpreted in several ways: for instance, by stressing the visual aspect of everyday life, especially in the framework of contemporary consumer culture, by accentuating the role of corporeality and sensuality in philosophy (somaesthetics, aesthetic thinking), by giving priority to beauty and perceptual pleasantness in various everyday life contexts, by emphasizing the importance of gratifying experiences specifically designed for “aesthetic consumers” and by linking it to the postmodern turn, or better to the postmodern attitude to blurry boundaries between well-established cultural areas. In other words, by virtue of this interrelation with aestheticization as a factor of increasing commodification, nowadays’ economics confirms that the aesthetic has become the new guiding principle of society (Naukkarinen 2012).

Secondly, the relationship that exists between signs, that is to say the “semiotic” dimension, must be interpreted in the light of the concept of “intersubjectivity”. This is an extremely difficult concept to explain in univocal terms, since it implies several layers of social interactions. But the point is that the implicit grammar underlying these layers crucially materializes into “aesthetic” acts (expressive gestures, appreciative interjections...) that constitute a relationship between individuals. For the sake of the present topic at issue, we can thus limit ourselves to highlight the fact that “intersubjectivity” can be understood aesthetically, as the specifically human relational engagement in possibly discussing or justifying in various ways, not necessarily at a propositional level, a personal taste preference, which is then open to consensus or criticism, but in any case absolutely shareable in principle.

Once this double emendation to Naukkarinen's thesis has been realized and acknowledged, a set of conceptual clusters will start to take shape, indeed showing a strong and reciprocal permeability, that might arouse the suspicion of some sort of interchangeability between them, yet not in a simplistic manner, but rather as symptomatic of an extremely wide-spread and essential situation. But let's proceed gradually.

On the one hand, a first aesthetic nucleus will emerge, which involves notions such as "commodification" and "aestheticization". In these terms it will thus be mainly linked to the concept of mass production and consumption. On the other hand, a second aesthetic nucleus comes to the fore, which includes notions such as "identity", "taste deictic", and hence "intersubjectivity". These conceptual clusters undeniably imply both a certain level of superficiality and a certain depth, given the profound, decisive impact that the notions they contain have for the modulation of contemporaneity. As a consequence, we cannot mean "superficial" in a judgmental way, but rather we should use this concept with the awareness of the fundamental role played by the immediacy of appearances, hence of the aesthetic. The apparent duality between surface and depth that has been ascribed to the two aforementioned conceptual clusters is, after all, also the specific feature of the aesthetic, which in its most original and pregnant conception as *aisthesis* implies both perceptual and cognitive aspects of experience.

Precisely in this regard, it becomes important to consider the link between the aesthetic and fashion. As a matter of fact, this particularly complex dialectics between immediacy and mediacy, visibility and invisibility, tangibility and intangibility, appearance and essence, in other words between surface and depth, seems also to connote two modalities through which the relationship between fashion and the everyday materializes nowadays, and that could be described as respectively ontological and phenomenological. At the ontological level, in fact, fashion produces aesthetic objects and makes them available in an everyday context (so that we can say that from an ontological point of view thanks to fashion we experience aesthetic matter). At the phenomenological level, fashion produces experiences, and hence affords the everyday a highly aesthetic dimension, which is able to generate salient moments in which the individual realizes him or herself through a style. All this takes place with a rhythm that is no longer substantial, but that is rather based on appearances

and immediacy, and that, nonetheless, is indeed able to forge everyday life itself (so that we can say that from a phenomenological point of view thanks to fashion the aesthetic matters). It is thus evident that these two levels intersect in various ways the dimension in which surface and depth dialectically interact.

On the one hand fashion's ontological-material level is undoubtedly institutive and essential, hence deep-seated, but such essentiality ultimately results as downright superficiality, or immediate availability. Following the analysis provided by Georg Simmel concerning fashion (and also concerning money)¹⁴ we can maintain that the fashion object is, in fact, an abstract object, or better, the product of an abstraction from meanings that, therefore, so to speak, "flattens" on the level of appearance, but at the same time is still able to make sense, since it creates, for instance, relationship networks, or social aggregation. It could be said that it is not a question of being meaningful, but rather of making sense. Paradigmatic instances of all this are afforded, for example, by ethnic clothes: once decontextualized (i.e., *abstracted* from their context), they no longer carry their original meaning, but once they have become constitutive elements of trendy looks they however make new sense, precisely by means of social aggregation phenomena. And it is also for this reason that a pure semiotic approach risks to impoverish the multifaceted nature of fashion phenomena, to the extent that it prevalently, if not even often exclusively, focuses on the identification and clarification of those meanings that the latter would make emerge.

On the other hand, the phenomenological-experiential dimension that fashion is able to provide to the everyday certainly contributes to a great extent to shaping the latter, by largely affecting its constitutive dynamics at an essential and deep-seated level. But at the same time, such essential experientiality is all constructed through appearances, and therefore it, in turn, implies a surface level as well.

5. *Towards an Everyday Aesthetics of fashion: a caveat*

Before analysing some implications of this general framework, in order to further develop these thematic nucleuses, a wider analysis of

¹⁴ In reference to fashion see Simmel 1904, and in reference to money see Simmel 1903.

EA's features is indeed required. In this way we believe that a more consistent connection between fashion and the aesthetics of everyday life can be established.

There is, in fact, a risk that should be avoided. Usually fashion is considered only in terms of clothing. And it would indeed be an important achievement if EA could produce an aesthetics of clothing. Nevertheless, although it is obviously linked to the fashion world, an aesthetics of clothing does not cover the wider topic of an (everyday) aesthetics of fashion, that is to say of a philosophical analysis of the problem of fashion more in general. In fact, the main issue for such an analysis should concern fashion's logic and ability to articulate taste preferences and to create personal identity and social relationships, and all this cannot be limited to the consideration of clothes. If EA reduces the aesthetics of fashion to the aesthetics of clothes in these terms, it, then, makes the same mistake made by traditional philosophical discourses, which demonize this fundamental problem because it concerns the more "frivolous and striking" as well as rapidly changing dynamics that connote the fashionable contents of our experience in general.

If reduced to an aesthetics of clothing, philosophical analysis would provide an only apparently privileged but evidently partial key for the understanding of fashion phenomena in "everyday mode". Hence, the question that should be answered now is: how can we justify a sufficiently satisfying and not reductive link between fashion and EA? Or, what kind of EA is able to take into account the capacity of fashion to deeply affect our everydayness?

EA arose in opposition to, or also in order to go beyond, the limitations of the art-centred paradigm that has historically oriented philosophical aesthetics. Such paradigm has, in fact, often overlooked a whole range of practices and objects that, while belonging to an everyday life experience level of manifestation and thus not commonly ascribable to an aesthetic context, certainly have a strong aesthetic valence. Nonetheless, due to its intrinsic allergy to any form of prescriptivism, EA has developed a form of, so to speak, theoretical "inclusivism", that constantly risks to reduce this subfield of aesthetics to a "default third basket for what is not comfortably categorized as fine art or natural beauty" (Melchionne 2013), with no conceptual and normative rigor.

In the framework of such an apparently unlimited speculative breadth, a recent critical trend has finally addressed the question of

normativity in EA, arguing that, by means of a systematization of EA's main methodological approaches, it would be possible to make emerge the tension, or conflict, between the forms of aestheticity they respectively promulgate, and hence attempt to solve it by identifying a normative aspect within such a topical discourse for contemporary aesthetics. The locution "critical trend" is symptomatic not only of the common approach adopted by the various advocates of the so called "normative turn", but also of the common or similar solution they propose, in order to overcome the rather unsatisfying "anything goes", which often seems to connote discussions on EA.

Dowling (2010) paved the way for the development of the fore-said trend: the author uses a terminology and formulates a normative proposal that would then be retrieved, shared, partly rectified or further elaborated in three more recent essays. In this programmatic essay, Weak Formulation and Strong Formulation of the aesthetics of everyday life respectively refer to the continuistic or discontinuistic position EA's main methodological approaches assume towards the established aesthetic theory, namely art-centred aesthetics. This nomenclature is adopted by Ratiu (2013), who identifies a methodological tension between a Weak and Strong Pole of EA, by Forsey (2014), who attempts to find a middle ground between an Extraordinary and a Familiarity Stance, and finally by Matteucci (2016a), who makes emerge the fruitfulness of a Continuistic Option and the limits of a Discontinuistic one.

We could maintain that the two main methodological approaches are generally meant, and commented on as follows: the Weak, or Extraordinary, or Continuistic option refers to the attempts to define the aesthetic pregnancy of the everyday by means of an extension of the concept of "aesthetic" usually involved in discussions on artistic value, in order to include typically everyday experiences (Dowling 2010: 241). The Strong, or Familiarity, or Discontinuistic option refers to the attempts to prove how completely ordinary experiences can afford paradigmatic instances of aesthetic experience in a way that is totally unbound from or even alternative to the limitations and conventions which connote, in the philosophy of art, debates on aesthetic value (Dowling 2010: 241).

The latter option, although certainly has the merit of attempting to identify the aesthetic specificity of the everyday *qua* everyday, that is to say in its being intrinsically ordinary, doesn't pursue the resolution of the question of the various forms of aestheticity, and of the

ways through which, between them, a certain conflict is generated. The Discontinuistic Option, in fact, doesn't recognize the inevitable porosity between a level of analysis that deals with art and another that deals with everyday life (Matteucci 2016a), by keeping them rigorously apart. By doing so it would moreover contradict the relational principle of aesthetics that we support here, for it would be constituted according to the principles of a close, autonomous system. On the other hand, the authors who share this critical stance also agree¹⁵ that the first option seems to be more adequate for the understanding of the current state of the aesthetic exactly because it, contrariwise, generally recognizes and makes more explicit the distinction between the aforementioned forms of aestheticity which constitute the everyday. Although these authors somehow all acknowledge their presence, among them only Matteucci (2016a) explicitly labels these wide-spread forms of aestheticity, or rather, aesthetic structures, which are typical of our contemporaneity, as respectively "hyper-aesthetic" superstratum with aestheticizing tendencies, and "hypo-aesthetic" substratum with a strong anthropological connotation. This second level, exactly because of its anthropological feature, appears to afford the opportunity to identify some sort of normative aspect that would avoid the risk of "lassism" inherent in the "tendency to include" which often seems to connote EA, against every form of traditional or "mainstream" dogmatism.

And according to the four authors such normative aspect lies in the possibility of intersubjective dialogue about our taste preferences, being them discursively articulated or expressively shown. Noteworthy is that each of them reaches such conclusion from different perspectives and backgrounds, proving that there is a shared belief that the intersubjectivist or, so to speak, "strongly relational" solution can eventually guarantee a certain degree of normativity.

¹⁵ It must be said, though, that Forsey's position cannot be considered fully supportive of a Continuistic Option. She rather aims to find a middle road between it and the Discontinuistic one since on the one hand, by following a pure Discontinuistic Option (at least that pursued by Arto Haapala), "we [would] lose the particularly aesthetic element of our daily lives to a sense of belonging" (Forsey 2014: 19), and on the other hand, by following a pure Continuistic Option we would equally "lose the particularly aesthetic element of our daily lives" by making it "somehow separate and exotic" (Forsey 2014: 19). "Embeddedness" in everyday life and "functionality" are, according to Forsey, the two notions that would make the process of finding a middle road between the two stances of EA possible.

6. Fashion equates the aesthetic

In order to prove that in this framework a satisfying link between fashion and Everyday Aesthetics can exist we will now try to combine these new elements with the considerations previously enucleated as concerns four conceptual clusters that we can summarize as follows:

- 1) commodification/mass culture/aestheticization;
- 2) identity/taste deictic/intersubjectivity;
- 3) surface/depth (which, as we have seen, are inextricably bound);
- 4) production of aesthetic objects and experiences in/for the everyday by fashion.

On the basis of the so-called Continuistic Option and of the identification of the two levels of “hyper-aestheticity” and “hypo-aestheticity”¹⁶ of the everyday, here’s what emerges.

To the “hypo-aesthetic” sphere would belong the experience of aesthetic objects ascribed to fashion, which makes them available everyday. Aesthetic objects being, for instance, clothes, accessories – elements, in other words, which are more immediately effective for the aesthetic assessment of human appearance – but also food, everyday use objects *stricto sensu*, various practices... (that can also become fashionable). Central for such dimension would be an interpretation of the notion of “use” as act or as a non-necessarily verbalized discourse that corresponds to a taste preference which, as such, is in principle shareable with others, and therefore, intersubjective. This sphere is characterized in a strong anthropological sense, and, consequently, is connoted by a dialectics between surface and depth, substance and change, permanence and obsolescence, between nature and culture, as a typical feature of the human being. And fashion is able to manage exactly this liminality. In this context what can be referred to fashion is the principle through which experience is articulated aesthetically in terms of a bottom-up ritualization realized by an individual, and concerning either his or her own identity or any everyday object, regardless of its origin or production and that can become, also by means of absolutely unwitting processes, fashionable. This is the institutionalizing dimension of aesthetics, where the aesthetic undergoes a process of institutionalization and where the indi-

¹⁶ For the development of this part of the text, I explicitly refer to Matteucci 2016a.

vidual makes him or herself available to use commodities, and makes them, as a matter of fact, aesthetic.

To the “hyper-aesthetic” sphere would instead belong the production, ideologically ascribable to the fashion-system as cultural industry, of objects and experiential devices, of which current aestheticization is a privileged means of articulation, and which are then intentionally made available for the everyday. This is the dimension in which fashion is already institutionalized, or better, is composed of a set of institutions (whose character could be either economic, aesthetic, social, political, religious...) that dictate what is temporarily validated as aesthetically valuable or, in other words, that dictate the standards of taste, which individuals are generally supposed to follow. In this second level the notion of “use” (to be then interpreted also in an intersubjective way) is integrated with what could be described as “variation possibility”, which is in turn connoted by an extreme rapidity that is functional precisely to the wide range of potential solutions that it offers. Clearly, such level of aestheticity does not have the same radical-anthropological power that the “hypo-aesthetic” sphere has, yet its increasing and implacable development is making it a true and proper constitutive element of our reality. It is thus evident how also in this case the boundaries that define the domains of the various spheres that we have described are extremely permeable. What we are facing here is, in fact, something that somehow resembles the by now, so to speak, “worn out” debate on the duality between nature and culture, since what is nowadays considered natural is nothing but embodied artificiality¹⁷. And this is precisely the threshold where we face the aesthetic in everyday life, even before art, that is to say where we face the ability it embodies to make the natural artificial and the artificial natural.

In conclusion, if we consider the relationship between fashion and the aesthetics of everyday life on the basis of the aesthetic contents that fashion produces, and then we integrate all this with the ability to afford a vast range of experiences that fashion has, we could reasonably interpret (the dynamics of) fashion “in everyday mode” as a downright (configuration of) lifestyle. The latter not meant as adhering to a mere a-critical attitude, but rather as a manifestation of the

¹⁷ For the analysis of the relationship between nature and technology, see Blumenberg (2010: 181-224) and for the relationship between naturality and history see Matteucci (2016b: 171-82).

increasingly wide-spread search for gratification (up to the sometimes perverting extreme of hedonism), according to which, when other guiding principles are lacking, or are not enough, it is exactly the aesthetic that determines our choices, and therefore decisively shapes our everyday lives. It simply makes sense. And it is precisely fashion as lifestyle that can be considered an emblem of this new state of things.

So, returning to the initial aims of the present inquiry, we could maintain that, at least in our contemporaneity, if both put to the test of everydayness, fashion and the aesthetic can be fully equated.

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