

Chapter 12: Niklas Luhmann: Fashion between the Fashionable and Old-fashioned

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Introduction

Prior to the January 2013 collections, Andrew Tuck, editor of lifestyle magazine *Monocle*, worried on the periodical's Internet blog that for today's fashion aficionados 'fashion is no longer fashionable', and you better not 'say you like fashion, you'll get yourself a terrible reputation' (Tuck, 2013). It seems that in today's fashion world, wanting to be in fashion is considered old-fashioned. This observation is a fashion insider form of distinction, but might also be suggestive of hostility towards fashion. Despite contemporary fashion theorists' continuous efforts to prove the critics wrong, fashion has been condemned time and again for its frivolous and ephemeral features. For instance, by comparing fashion to more timeless cultural formations that allegedly express deeper, hidden meanings like the fine arts, critics continue to allocate fashion with its purported lack of depth and rationality to the lower steps of the ladder of cultural worth. By taking up the grand theoretical framework of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998), this chapter considers whether there is logic to the operations of fashion and whether Luhmannian theory may aid fashion scholars in addressing the repudiation of their object of inquiry.

All Things Social

In his thirty year career the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann touched upon a wide range of topics, from mass media to time and from education to the arts. Authoring over 50 books and 400 articles, of which so far only a few have been translated into English, his work has had a major influence on several disciplines. Suffice it to say that this chapter will be an introduction to his comprehensive theoretical framework.

In the above section I describe Luhmann's theoretical framework as 'grand'. This is exactly what he intended his work to be. Reasoning in a highly abstract manner, Luhmann

was often critiqued for his nearly indigestible prose. After introducing Luhmann's key concepts, this chapter seeks to transform possible conceptual intimidation into an understanding that his 'suprtheory' (Luhmann, 1995: 4) of all things social contributes some important theoretical tools for fashion scholars. Thinking of fashion through the work of Niklas Luhmann offers a pathway to strengthen the position of those who wish to theorize further how it can be that the power of fashion remains so hard to overcome, despite all the criticism addressed to it.

The next section highlights Luhmann's major concepts following Borch's (2010) three phases in the sociologist's oeuvre: his focus on the relation between system and environment of the 1970s, the autopoietic turn of the 1980s and the paradoxical turn of the 1990s. The section likewise outlines Luhmann's view of modern society. The subsequent part of the chapter discusses his scarce writing on fashion and explores the existing Luhmannian theoretical analyses of fashion (Esposito, 2004, 2009; Loschek, 2009; Schiermer, 2010). I conclude by pointing to the insights a Luhmannian perspective might spark in fashion studies.

Luhmann in Context

Niklas Luhmann's interest in sociology was sharpened by a stay at Harvard University in 1960-61 under the supervision of Talcott Parsons (1951), the renowned American proponent of functional systems theory. Luhmann quickly realized how Parsonian systems theory was incompatible with his own view of *systems*. A system in general refers to a unified entity that can operate on its own separate from the environment (Luhmann, 1995). The difference between Parsons' and Luhmann's interpretation of a system is that Parsons considers the actions of people taking up important positions structured by role expectations to be the building blocks of a system, where Luhmann sees communications (*infra*) as the constituents of a system.

Luhmann was primarily interested in social systems and wanted to draw attention to the question of how social systems 'make sense' of their environment. In analysing systems, Luhmann emphasizes the *boundaries* between systems and their environment. Diverse types of system appear only because they differentiate themselves vis-à-vis what they are not, meaning whatever lies outside the boundaries of the system.

Being interested in social systems, Luhmann's analysis of the social realm begins with the broad claim that *distinction* determines the social sphere. In developing his understanding of the concept of distinction, Luhmann (1993) aligned his systems theory with the postmodern French thinking on difference, which found its most known arbiter in Jacques Derrida (1974,

1978) and his theory of deconstruction. Both theorists share the idea that self-reflection, or what Luhmann calls *observations of the second-order*, that observe how others and you as the ‘Other’ observe, are predicated on ‘differences, to look at distinctions without the hope of regaining unity at a higher (or later) level’ (Luhmann, 1993: 766). Consequently, systems cannot be understood as unities, rather it is *difference* that characterizes them most. Luhmann likewise employs his understanding of distinction to distance himself from contemporary sociologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu (see chapter 13), who hold the common sense view of distinction as individuals and groups seeking to set themselves apart from others through identifying with aesthetic or social values and practices associated with specific social groupings such as, in the case of Bourdieu, classes.

Three Phases

Draw a Distinction

Luhmann’s concept of *distinction* marks the first phase in his oeuvre. As stated, this does not entail the dynamic between belonging and setting oneself apart. Rather he draws on the notion of *observation* in the philosophical logics of George Spencer-Brown’s ‘Laws of Form’ (1969) to understand distinction. Luhmann sees it, simply put, as a concept of demarcation (Luhmann, 1998). When systems observe, they distinguish between two elements, while relying on only one side of the distinction. The totality of the observation thus remains out of sight. Systems construe an understanding of reality in a *first-order observation* that produces its own blind spot: the two poles of the distinction. Following Spencer-Brown, Luhmann labels such an observation as a *form* or, in German, a *Leitdifferenz*. Systems employ these operations of distinction to perform their main goal: *the reduction of complexity*. Let me give an example related to fashion.

Imagine you need to decide what to wear to work in the morning. You open up the wardrobe that you share with your spouse and are overwhelmed by the complex tangle of garments you see. First you distinguish based on the observation ‘my stuff/partner’s clothes’. Next you distinguish between the various categories of garments, demarcating between skirts and trousers (lower body garments), tops and blouses (upper body garments). In each of those established categories, you then select one option, because in reality you cannot wear two trousers at once. In the end, you choose your red pair of jeans. Two elements here are essential to grasping Luhmann’s notion of distinction. First, your series of observations are not necessarily conscious or deliberate. Second, when focusing on your clothes only, you forget the first step you took to simplify the complex decision of what to wear based on the

two poles of the observation. The distinction ‘my stuff/spouse’s clothes’, thus becomes the blind spot of your first observation.

Hence distinction is the most basic operation through which something meaningful is constructed. Meaning is a notion Luhmann (1995: 60) understands, however, in the Husserlian sense of *Sinn*, which finds a better translation in the English word *sense*, as employed in ‘making-sense’ through selection within the horizon of whatever is possible. The red jeans you wear are meaningful because you selected one possibility from the mass of garments you own, not because the trousers ‘mean’ something in the sense of ‘representation’. Moreover, your choice excluded all other skirts and trousers. Yet these selections remain open, since the other possibilities in your wardrobe are only temporarily closed off. You may wear those options at some other time. In addition, you could have chosen other trousers. Therefore selections are *contingent* or, as Luhmann (1998: 45) likes to put it, ‘neither necessary nor impossible’.

Perhaps the discussion on what to wear to work gave you the impression that in Luhmann’s work the subject is central to sense-making. Of course people, who Luhmann terms *psychic systems*, make sense of the world through mental acts of distinguishing between the various options available. Yet contrary to phenomenology, which sees meaning as attributed by the individual’s ‘experience’, Luhmann does not privilege the subject as observer (Luhmann, 1990: 23). He argues that all types of systems, thus also *social systems*, make sense of themselves and their environment through observation. In keeping with the de-subjectified nature of his conceptual frame, Luhmann finds that there are two kinds of observers: *psychic systems* (persons) that observe via consciousness and *social systems* that observe via communication. When we turn to the question how systems create and maintain their boundaries, we enter a new phase in Luhmann’s thinking, regarding the autopoietic.

Functional Differentiation and Autopoiesis

During the 1980s the notion of *autopoiesis*, from the Greek words ‘auto’ (self) and ‘poiesis’ (production), received most of Niklas Luhmann’s (1995) attention. Central to the concept is that all systems maintain their boundaries by self-producing their own meaning-constructions: people self-produce cognition and the different social systems self-produce communications. These systems thus follow an *operative closure*, although they are not disembedded from their environment. Remember that systems come into being through construing a difference with their environment. Yet because of this difference the system and its environment remain co-dependent. This mutual dependence Luhmann terms *structural couplings*. As a consequence,

systems co-evolve in the sense that a change in one system, constituting the environment of other systems, will give an impetus for change in another system.

For instance, the operative logic of fashion may influence the sciences: think of the recent linguistic, performative and material turns in the humanities and social sciences which seem to express the desire of scholars to engage with the temporal logic of fashion in adopting a fashionable or ‘of the moment’ theoretical perspective. This interference of fashion within the science system, however, does not occur in a simplistic pattern of cause and effect. Systems cannot straightforwardly influence the operations of other systems. When a new academic book frames its narrative within a popular conceptualization, the scholarly public may recognize that the fashionable element is part of the book’s appeal. Yet scholars would never approve of such research solemnly because it adheres to the latest academic fad. Instead, they privilege studies that represent and explicate the research questions in a highly plausible manner. Fashion merely *irritates* science, so to speak. It produces a perturbation in the science system, which science then deals with in its own communications.

Luhmann sees modern society as made up by various *functionally differentiated social subsystems*. Yet theorizing modern society in this light is not new. Various theorists in the sociological tradition embraced the concept of a differentiated society, from Karl Marx to Georg Simmel. Niklas Luhmann added his idea of autopoiesis to the differentiation thesis. In modern society we find various self-producing subsystems that offer society something only they can deliver. Luhmann explored science (1990), economics (1999), education (2002), politics (2000) and art (2000) as such functional subsystems, which are entirely self-producing or autopoietic. Indeed in Luhmann’s strict vision (2002b: 116-17), if systems do not produce their own operations through system-specific communications, they are not systems.

With functional differentiation, initiated between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, modern society grew radically different from earlier societal formations (Luhmann, 1997). Archaic societies are defined by *segmentary differentiation*, for instance, with kinship as a principal organizational form. *Stratification differentiation* characterizes high-culture societies divided by hierarchical social strata, classes or castes. Luhmann argues that modern society is the most complex societal formation because it has incorporated the two other forms of societal organization. Think of how, in the fashion world of the early twentieth century, Parisian houses such as Lanvin and Worth mostly kept business succession within the family (segmentary) or how most fashion companies today still rely on the unpaid labour of interns who are lowest in rank (stratification). Moreover, in our modern differentiation,

societal forms occur that have not yet reached functional differentiation, i.e. the caste system in India is still present today.

How does a functional subsystem come into being and how does it operate? *Success media* trigger the differentiation of function systems through providing a binary code structure around which the communications in the subsystem can revolve (Luhmann, 1997: 358-59). These media are not the mass media, however, but instances that increase the probability of the success of communications, such as money (Luhmann, 1990b). In the economic system money allows you to buy that pair of red jeans. Yet you cannot rely on it to bring successful outcomes for any operation outside the economic system: if a scientist uses money to convince a publisher to disseminate his/her work, that would be regarded as a bribe. The *binary codes* these success media spark likewise pertain only to one functional subsystem. Furthermore, the codes are strictly binary. The economy oscillates between payment and non-payment, for instance, and the sciences between true and false. In other words, you cannot 'more or less' pay someone, just like a specific scientific assertion cannot be 'a bit' true. This implies that, like all other social systems, functional subsystems are operationally closed, meaning that they are not at all interested in the workings, communications and perspectives of other subsystems. Every subsystem therefore produces its own reality and may operate along its self-produced operative logic (Luhmann, 1990c: 693). Operative logic will differ in a legal perspective from that in an art perspective, for example. In Luhmann's theory binary codes remain closed off to change. Nonetheless, subsystems themselves are highly flexible and open. A subsystem's binary code does not decide itself how and when it should be applied. Instead, *programs* are the criteria for the application of the code. They control how to attribute the code correctly. Programs may undergo considerable change and may even be replaced by new programs (Luhmann, 1995: 317). Think of a paradigm shift in the sciences which incites the need for new theories and methodologies without touching its basic operative code. Luhmann's understanding of the functional differentiation of modern society has several important consequences. First, because every functional subsystem may produce its own operative logic, a societal problem will be regarded and acted upon differently by every subsystem (Luhmann, 1995b). This has both discursive and temporal implications. Every subsystem speaks its own language. For instance, fashion aficionados have adopted a specific fashion discourse, or in Luhmann's words *semantics*, which is often foreign to the non-interested. Likewise systems operate in different temporal horizons. The timeframe for legal jurisdiction is different from the timeframe of fashion, known for its short-lived temporality. Second, Luhmann imagines society as *flat*: no subsystem has the power to

intervene in another. Unlike scholars working in the Marxist tradition, who Luhmann believes overestimate the importance of the economic system, Luhmann privileges no subsystem. There is no vantage point from which we can observe all of society, which implies that every perspective we take inevitably has a blind spot. Furthermore, because of the absence of an overarching perspective, every social system continuously produces its own 'ways of not seeing'. This brings us to *paradox*: the notion Niklas Luhmann meticulously developed in the 1990s.

Paradox

Every system produces its own blind spot, which ultimately leads to a paradox. When we return to the principal elements of sense-making, i.e. observation and distinction, we will comprehend paradox better. Recall you decided to wear the red jeans. Now assume your friend asks you why you chose to wear the garment. You maintain you selected the trousers because 'these are in fashion nowadays'. Luhmann calls such statement a *first-order observation* in which you claim something to be the case. Imagine that your friend replies with the following *observation of the second-order*: 'It's so interesting you say that. I just read this article that asked whether wanting to be in fashion is actually still fashionable.' Citing the *Monocle* journalist, your friend here observes your initial justification that the jeans were fashionable through applying that very same distinction. At this moment a paradox appears that blocks further observations, because how can one reply to the statement questioning whether wanting to be in fashion is still fashionable? Unlike traditional epistemologies that view paradoxes as indicators of conceptual flaws, they do not worry Niklas Luhmann at all. In his later work he proposed how the recognition of paradoxes may actually reveal that which remains beyond reach: the strategies systems employ in practice to function despite paradoxes (Luhmann, 1995b: 52). This is why Luhmann's later project paid so much attention to second-order observations, because this type of observation allows you to observe the blind spot of your own and other systems' observations. He finds that modern society consists of a plethora of paradoxes (Luhmann, 1995b). Fashion too, as I explain below, is predicated on a myriad of paradoxes (Esposito, 2004, 2011). One trajectory fashion scholars can take to conceptualize further the power of fashion is to probe the paradoxes at its heart.

The Paradoxes of Fashion

Luhmann's writings on fashion are scarce. The only text in which he addresses the question of fashion directly is a book review (Luhmann, 1984) of Udo Schwarz's monograph (1982) *Das Modische*. There Luhmann proposes that fashion enables systems to deal with a great amount

of contingency or uncertainty because it finds its own rationality or operative logic in the reliability of the changeable. Recently Elena Esposito (2004, 2011) developed this line of thought further in arguing that the nature of fashion is inherently paradoxical. Such paradoxes find a clear articulation in both the temporal and social dimensions of fashion.

First, fashion developed its own operative logic from the continuity of its changeable character. In other words, fashion proffered ‘the stability of the transitional’ (Esposito, 2011: 607). Where in early modernity this proposal was still met with distrust, soon it acquired a sense of factuality and, I would add, normativity, in the sense that the modern individual only finds the changeable to be likeable, approvable and to be the object of reference for all items of fashion deemed to be ‘good’. In fashionable dress, it seems that only a ‘scheduled transitoriness’ (Luhmann, 1989: 256 cited in Esposito, 2011: 608) grants us firm ground, to the extent that we now constantly expect things to differ from whatever dress style came before. Second, modernity became obsessed with individuality and originality because its subject paradigm made it the ultimate carrier of agency and change. Whether trickle-down or bubble-up, particular fashion-forward individuals or groups (in the sense of a community of early adaptors) set the example for all others to follow. Yet it is paradoxical that an individual should do what others do in order to be an individual (Esposito, 2004).

Furthermore, this mimetic side of fashion holds such penetrating power into both fashionable dress and other cultural formations because it looks so harmless (Esposito, 2011). The power of fashion lies exactly in its frivolous and transient character. Fashion can acquire a mask of harmless ephemerality because it knows how to neutralize its paradoxes. For instance, we constantly expect to be surprised by the newness and difference of the latest fashions. Yet this temporal expectation is paradoxical in the normality it has acquired. Through attributing these expectations of surprise to the originality of individuals, however, the social paradox compensates for the temporal one. For instance, through picturing fashion designers as creative autonomous artists or particular celebrity fashion icons as the arbiters of the new, we neutralize the temporal paradox that lays bare how fashion in its changeability is compared to the continuous.

Engaging with the question of whether fashion is a functional subsystem of modern society further offers a Luhmannian route to tackling the lower cultural status of fashion. Remember that Luhmann privileges no societal subsystem. The next section proposes that if fashion is such a functional subsystem, there is conceptual space to rebuff the ladder of cultural valorisation which tends to allocate fashion to its lower steps.

Is Fashion a Functional Subsystem of Modern Society?

The answer to the above question seems a straightforward, affirmative one. Just a quick glance at the contemporary fields of luxury, mass fashion production and consumption seems to yield the insight that other societal subsystems have no say in determining the next fashion. Yet the few fashion scholars who have turned to Niklas Luhmann for theoretical guidance have not yet settled the debate. Where Doris Schmidt (2007) and Ingrid Loschek (2009) see fashionable dress as a functional subsystem, Elena Esposito (2004, 2011), Bjorn Schiermer (2010) and Udo Schwartz (1982) have their doubts. Let us first turn to the work of those scholars who theorize that fashionable dress is a subsystem that operates by following self-produced communications.

Both Schmidt (2007) and Loschek (2009: 21-28) picture fashionable dress as a subsystem in which all communications ultimately revolve around the binary code of In and Out. For example, fashion media that structure their reports on fashion items in 'In and Out' columns evidence clearly this binary code. Loschek and Schmidt differ, however, on the subject of material fashion objects. For Schmidt (2007: 46) the cut, fabrics, patterns and textures are the very communications of fashion. Loschek (2009: 133-36) instead perceives such features as parts of the programs of the system, in which the changeable nature of fashion manifests itself most clearly. Because the binary code of In and Out implies the additional code of Fashionable and Old-fashioned, Loschek maintains that the system-specific communications of fashion are centred around social validity. She writes: 'the question of which clothing is fashion is an exclusively social, communicatively negotiated definition.' (Loschek, 2009: 25).

Yet this idea seems foreign to a traditional Luhmannian perspective. In his work on the art system, for instance, Luhmann (2000) claims that works of art put forth themselves as 'art' by means of 'communications *through* art' (Schinkel, 2010). I would argue that we can extrapolate Luhmann's assumption to other cultural products, and that he views the material fashion objects as communicating 'I am fashion'; much like Doris Schmidt described the communications of the fashion system occurring *through* the stuff of fashion. This is to say that Luhmann refers communications *about* art or *about* fashion (museums, buyers, journalism), in deciding which objects count as art or fashion, to the environment of the systems of art and fashion. Nonetheless, Loschek writes that 'any garment other than what has been agreed upon as fashion is simply clothing' (Loschek, 2009: 136). This begs the question as to who communicates fashion-status *about* clothing and how they legitimately do so. Luhmann (2000) tends to assume an object or practice to be art a priori, however, the question

above points us to the work of the ‘cultural intermediaries’ (Bourdieu, 1996) of fashion, such as journalists, buyers, photographers and stylists. They not only disseminate the latest trends but negotiate decisions on fashion status. Consequently, I contend that scholars who seek to theorize fashion as a self-producing system should include the communications *about* fashion, because in reality these ground, judge and stabilize communications *through* fashion.

For example, in 1982 Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons presented in Paris a now iconic piece of knitwear; a deliberately distressed black sweater with holes in it. In this and her following collections Kawakubo posited the hyper-reflexive question ‘can this be fashion?’ *through* her fashionable designs. Yet probing the limits of fashion in such a way was possible only because the communications of those (traditionally journalists, buyers, editors) that talk and write *about* fashion fostered the prior recognition that Kawakubo’s experimental designs were part of the fashion system’s communications. Communications *about* fashion recognized her communications *through* the distressed sweater as *within* the system. Hence, communications *through* fashion, where interpretation is contingent on the degree that it could be read and interpreted otherwise, do not gain meaning independent of communications *about* fashion. The latter communications thus need to be conceptualized as part of the subsystem.

Finding that fashionable dress is indeed an autopoietic subsystem of modern society implies a forceful argument against critics who think of fashion as immersed in a hierarchical relationship with other cultural formations. Recall that in the Luhmannian framework there is no eagle eye perspective from which to observe the entire system. In other words, the fashion system does not operate hierarchically, like it appears to in other sociological perspectives of fashion production. For instance, working within a Marxist tradition that prioritizes the economic system, Bourdieu sees fashion as caught between the artistic and economic fields (Bourdieu and Delsaut, 1975: 22). Financial considerations (particularly in the case of fashion at a high price point) are thought to debase the status of fashion as a valorised cultural or artistic practice. When fashion seeks to climb the ladder of cultural valorisation, it thus misrecognizes its market liaisons in a *reversed economy*. Aligning itself more closely with fine arts, we speak of *artification* (Shapiro, 2007), meaning that fashion becomes ‘artful’ or an art ‘more or less’. This idea is embedded, for instance, in the widespread assumption that fashion is not a ‘pure art’, but an ‘applied art’ or part of the ‘decorative arts’. Yet when thinking of fashion as a functional subsystem scholars, nor politicians or artists can decide what the next fashion will be, which implies that the communications that constitute the fashion system have to be regarded in and for themselves, rather than as being located on a

comparative scale with other cultural formations, such as the fine arts and literature. Thinking of fashion through the Luhmannian framework goes beyond the idea of a cultural hierarchy between fashion and art. Fashion communications simply pertain to the fashion system and art communications to the system of art.

Nonetheless, several fashion scholars have noted that fashionable dress soaks up developments and changes in the economy, politics and the arts (Blumer, 1969: 283; Schiermer, 2010: 30), suggesting that fashionable dress is not completely self-producing and thus not a modern functional subsystem, as Schmidt and Loschek claimed it to be. Elena Esposito (2004) and Bjorn Schiermer (2010) have developed this line of thought, with two key elements. First, scholars have hitherto insufficiently theorized the exclusive task fashionable dress fulfils in modern society. Recall that in the Luhmannian framework all subsystems offer society something only they can deliver. Despite the insightful contributions to this question from the theory of social ambivalence (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton, 1995), the academic debate has not considered fully whether fashionable dress has something unique to offer modern society. Second, we may raise serious objections to the idea of Fashionable and Old-fashioned as the binary code of the subsystem. When Kawakubo drew on this distinction, such communications *through* the materiality of design must have been possible by an autonomous code different from the one Kawakubo played with to observe the difference between fashionable dress and its environment. Ultimately we may therefore wonder whether fashion has a binary code and is a functional subsystem of modern society after all. Although future research may conclude that we cannot theorize fashionable dress as a Luhmannian system (which blocks the route to a non-hierarchical reading of the cultural worth of fashion), the undeniable power of fashion remains beyond dispute. It manifests itself in the frivolous and transient character of fashion, which is mired in paradoxes regardless of it being a functional subsystem of society.

Conclusion: Niklas Luhmann in Fashion Studies

This chapter has sought to offer a first introduction to the comprehensive framework Niklas Luhmann developed in social systems theory in light of its potential wider application to fashion studies. Hitherto few fashion scholars have adopted a Luhmannian perspective. The chapter took up the question whether we may regard fashionable dress as a functional subsystem of modern society, on which scholars have not yet made up their minds. Future research will have to examine in greater detail whether and to what extent the necessary conditions to make such an assertion apply to fashionable dress. In this respect I proposed a

key element for further consideration: communications *about* fashion have to be considered as part and parcel of the system of fashion. This argument offers a stepping stone to understanding 'the fashion system', if we find it to be in place, as interlaced with insights from Bourdieusian field theory.

Before I point out some promising courses Luhmann's framework might take in the academic debate on fashion, let me note an important shortcoming of his work. Scholars interested in the materiality of fashion and dress will find little value in Luhmann's framework. He explicitly wrote regarding art that its material aspects are not part of the system (Luhmann, 2000). Luhmann would not be interested in the material grounds of fashion: its fabrics, cuts, silhouettes and connection to the living body. Surely such an observation proves problematic when applied to fashion, which cannot do away with its material roots nor with its embodied nature. Many contemporary designers communicate their ideas through the stuff of fashion. To them the material of the dress is meaningful. Despite this shortcoming, Luhmann's comprehensive framework offers fashion studies an important pathway for further exploration.

A better understanding of the paradoxical nature of fashion will benefit the theoretical advancement of the academic debate, because the analysis of second-order observations allows us to unravel what remained unseen before; its various strategies to dismantle paradoxes. In my own research I examine the notion of paradox in the historical relation between change and continuity in fashionable dress. In any paradox or Luhmannian observation, one pole cannot do without the other. Yet in the current academic debate this mutual dependence tends to be denied, owing to plentiful definitions of fashion essentially predicated on change (e.g. Kawamura, 2004; Lipovetsky, 2002; Wilson, 2003). Furthermore, this conception is sometimes granted a transhistorical component. Fashion has always been about change, irrespective of the time period (Kawamura, 2004: 5). Yet bearing in mind the Luhmannian paradoxes discussed, such tendencies to essentialism obviously do not fall into place. Just as fashion is not all-concerned with mimesis or individuality, it is neither all-concerned with change. The fact, however, that both actors in the current high-fashion industry and scholars of fashion are prone to work with such a one-sided vision merits our attention. It begs the question how we and they have grown to take for granted the idea that fashion is immersed exclusively in constant change. I would thus like to propose for the future study of the paradoxes of fashion a thorough historicisation of the performative aspects by which many involved in the production of fashion and its study have aligned themselves to just one side of the distinction. Moreover, a thorough analysis of the various paradoxes of

fashion would contribute to an improved comprehension of the power of fashion. Referring to the citation that opened this chapter, I would argue that critics can oppose fashion as much as they want, 'but don't think for a moment that you have dodged the fickleness of dress codes, aka fashion' (Tuck 2013).

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