mary sources. The only recording of this work I have been able to find is by Eduard van Beinum conducting the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. Despite the metronome marking in the score, the performance tempo is ♩.=28!

Looking at Reger's phrasing, I wondered why an excellent musician —and Reger was that, whatever you may think of his compositions— should have made what I considered to be an unmusical mistake. Or was I perhaps wrong. Then I had one of those happy "inspirations" for which one thanks the Goddess Fortuna. I recalled that the great German musicologist, Hugo Riemann, had a theory that all music was essentially anacrustic—even though the upbeats might be suppressed. I checked for a possible connection, and there in old, reliable *Grove's Dictionary,* I learned that:

> . . . in 1890 young Reger went to [Riemann] as a pupil, following him the next year to Wiesbaden and soon becoming a teacher in the same conservatoire as his master.[4]

But the gifts of Goddesses generally have their price—their uncomfortable side, as this did for me. For the moral of the story of Reger's aberrant phrasing would seem to be: "Cultivate a taste for speculative theory, but season it with a soupçon of skepticism."

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4. *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* fifth edition, ed. by Eric Blom (New York, 1954), IV, 346.

The Clothed Image: Picture and Performance

Anne Hollander

PERFORMANCE implies a temporal act, a following of a text upon a particular occasion. The act of dressing is a kind of performance based on a text provided by a myth of appearance, which in turn is generated in the consciousness through pictures. Mental pictures composed of the body in its clothing are recreated at will in mirrors, which become pictures for the purpose. The concept of dress as an element in social role-playing is obvious and as common in sociological and psychological study as is the notion of theatrical dressing for particular dramatic roles. By pursuing further the study of actual clothing as if it were theatrical costume, one then passes beyond the basic notions of role into the realm of visual style, which has an organic life of its own in dress as it does in all its other manifestations in art.

It has long been clear that dress has always been used to express variations of status, sexuality, wealth, age, reverence for supernatural power or simple whim. More difficult to perceive are the sources of the multiple images by which each of these ideas may be figured forth through the clothing of the body. As in the designing of theatrical dress, there are always many costumes which might express the same notion of role, and the choice among which is entirely a matter of style. E. H. Gombrich has pointed out[1] that all created images are founded upon and refer to other created images, rather than deriving from natural phenomena directly; and so the image of the clothed human body, whether it appears as an element in pictures or in the individual imagination as a self-image, refers to shapes and lines conceived in particular styles and drawn from received visual impressions, rather than from physical awareness.

1 E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (New York, 1960), pp. 23-25.

I. Nudes Out of Clothes

The human figure is the only element in the whole range of artistic subject matter which may, and indeed must, be taken personally. The human figure in art speaks directly to the humanity of the beholder. Kenneth Clark has illuminated this brilliantly in his study of the nude,[2] and the clothed figure commands the same immediacy in all its variations upon the dialectic of drapery and anatomy. The unique power of the clothed figure in art derives from the fact that among human beings absolute nudity is not the natural state, but rather one of two constantly polarized states. The nude in art has followed its own conventions which spring, Clark maintains, from the basic idealizing impulse in man and which were crystallized for western culture in ancient Greece. But he has ignored another impulse often at work in the making of nude figures: an expression of the current ideals of the clothed body. When he compares a nude photograph from the middle of the nineteenth century with a Courbet nude,[3] he uses this juxtaposition to show how photography began by imitating the work of artists, and how Courbet's realism sheds a glow of authenticity and beauty upon the photograph, which otherwise fails by falling short of ideal nude beauty. In fact, however, both Courbet's realistic nude and the contemporary photograph depend for their effect on their use of that nude ideal which is drawn from fashionable dress. Courbet's nude, rather than abandoning idealism for reality, is replacing the classical ideal with another.

The ideal clothed image continually reflected in nude art is frequently reserved for representation with an emphatic erotic content, whether it is used by a painter of genius like Courbet or by a semi-pornographic engraver like Dévèria. The erotic function of dress, emphasizing certain physical characteristics at certain historical moments and minimizing others, is manifested in these erotic nude pictures in which the specific suggestive shapes of the fashionable clothes of the time are expressed by the unclothed body. That body has been corseted and padded, pushed in, pressed down, or expanded into the fashionable shape, and then the distorting machinery has been removed, leaving its achievements imprinted upon the nude form. The *Maja Desnuda* of Goya is a splendid example of this process by a great artist whose sense of both the erotic and the esthetic power of fashionable dress was very strong, as was Courbet's. As the Maja lies down,

2 Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York, 1956).

3 Clark, pp. 6-7.

her breasts defy the law of gravity, held as they are by an invisible corset which maintains them in their high, separate firmness. In the same way, both the Courbet *La Source* and the photograph used by Kenneth Clark show the rounded shoulders, neatly defined small waist, and immense buttocks implied by the corset, petticoats and modish garments of the mid-nineteenth century. Figures by Lucas Cranach, which Clark describes as a kind of last flowering in the development of the Gothic Christian nude, show their debt to the fashionable silhouette of the first quarter of the sixteenth century in Germany. Since these particular nudes are so obviously erotic, their relation to fashion is easy to read, especially since they often retain small elegant accessories which emphasize the fact that their other garments have been removed. The *Nymph of the Spring* even has her dress rolled up under her head for a pillow, and many such patently erotic figures have garments shown nearby, as if to stress just this sexual power in the relationship between fashionable clothing and desirable body. It is possible, moreover, to look at certain nude photographs and many nude paintings intended to be realistic or erotic, and to ascertain the date of the picture from the clothing which is absent.

Clark considers most Gothic nudes to be expressive of the shamefulness or vulnerability of the body, and yet their erotic content is often strengthened by the same reference to a fashionable clothed silhouette which, in the fifteenth century, can be mistaken for a meagre view of the flesh. The little figures of Eve in *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, and the Eves of Van Eyck and Hugo van der Goes, are aimed at the spiritual lesson of the Biblical story, not at erotic expression. And yet they are far from pitiful or awkward if one imagines them wearing the elegant and refined Flemish court dress of the fifteenth century, which is rendered so perfectly by van der Goes and Memling, for example, in their portraits of Maria Portinari. The breasts and shoulders are small, neat and chiselled as well as partially exposed, and the waist is high and tiny. Below falls the immense sweep of the double skirt more than a yard too long, which must be held up in front. The belly must swing forward to support it, and the head, enlarged by a steeple headdress, bends forward to balance the swing. The head is also enlarged by plucking back the hairline to increase the height of the brow. The delicate breasts and shoulders above the swelling bellies of gothic nudes are perfect reflections of this fashion, which expresses the sexual appeal of a body weighted down with fabric, dragging and managing heavy folds, yet tender and even bony above the waist. The mid-twentieth century shares with the fifteenth this feeling for the tense desirability of the thin body. The

Gothic "clothed" nudes, however, needed the thrusting belly to support the invisible skirt, and so their bulblike shape evolved. They are freighted with the same erotic power and esthetic idealism as Courbet's nudes. They are no more realistic for having ignored the classical ideal, but rather manifest that convention of nudity which celebrates the influence of clothing.

An interesting feature of Gothic nudes and the later Northern ones based upon them, incidentally, is that they occasionally display pubic hair. The classical convention avoids pubic hair because it destroys the harmony of the ideal form, and it is relegated somehow to the status of an unfortunate mistake in nature. Even one of the most realistic and erotic nudes of the nineteenth century, Manet's *Olympia*, avoids it, although the other appurtenances in the picture and its revolutionary harshness and lack of classical reverence might justify the presence of pubic hair as well. It remains almost entirely either a feature of pornography or of preliminary studies made from the model, which were never intended to be shown as finished works of art (e.g., Ingres's nude study, in the Fogg Museum, made for his painting of Roger and Angelica). Some Gothic and Northern Renaissance nudes show it, however, in figures both sacred and profane, except when they have been borrowed from the Mediterannean tradition. Both Eve and Voluptas may be seen displaying a pubic tuft, which, therefore, cannot be meant to express only the body's humiliating imperfections. When it appears it must be meant to carry its erotic weight, not just to stand as a record of the mundane truth. It would be interesting to investigate the extent of the classical taboo on pubic hair: Do the Italian Renaissance nudes show none because depilation was actually practiced by fashionable Italian women? Do Northern nudes display it because Northern ladies did not remove it? Or are these purely pictorial conventions?

II. Clothing in Paintings

The clothed figure in art is so general, familiar and various an image that the many aspects of it must clearly be separated. Let us first consider the clothing contemporary with the painter and customarily worn either by the subjects of his portraits or by figures in his genre scenes. These clothed figures can be sources for historical research in dress, and may serve as documents along with inventory lists, tailors' bills and gossipy memoirs—assuming that the artist may safely be relied upon to record faithfully rather than to invent, omit,

gloss over, idealize or exaggerate. (In fact, of course, the use of pictures for research in dress is a tricky business: the clothing of the figure is so often a matter of generalization. Periods of art when hard-edged, careful detail is stylistically desirable provide evidence about buttons and seams which is lacking in sketchier styles; and yet these in turn may provide a better sense of the gesture and movement characteristic of the day, or of the texture and weight of cloth.)

The primary historical value of the clothed figure is that it preserves the artist's version of the contemporary general ideal—not so much a record of how people actually looked, but of how they thought, or hoped, they looked. Even a painter with the austere vision of Chardin, devoid of rhetorical flourish or suave flattery, will yet idealize the clothed body within his chosen limits. He creates figures whose spare simplicity and neatness of gesture provide a standard of bourgeois elegance dependent upon spotless linen, perfectly fitting garments, and unruffled demeanor however lowly the occupation. Terborch, from whom Chardin learned much, displays a fashionable ideal on a more sumptuous level, betraying more obvious concern with dress for its own sake, but also a similar preoccupation with decorum in feminine clothes. Drooping, confined shoulders, combined with an emphatic perfection of coiffure and absolutely smooth boning of the bodice, demand an immobility above the waist which is relieved only by the swift flow of light over satin skirts. The free play of the folds provides an attractive liveliness seemingly unsuitable even for the face, which remains impassive in most of the pictures. Such ladies appear in many similar Dutch pictures of the same date, their sartorial perfections and emotional nullity providing a strict ideal indeed. The dress in such paintings is clearly detailed and suggests evidence of actual practice and usage, as do the interior settings. And yet the artist has created the figures in an ideal clothed shape which could only have been momentarily achieved by living people, plump Dutch girls whose stays would have wrinkled under the pressure of actuality. Bony, square shoulders, or other departures from ideal clothed perfection, would have been mentally minimized, forced into obscurity by careful bodily gestures, and glossed over by the self-regarding eye in the mirror.

In the first half of the seventeenth century in England, Van Dyck established a standard of elegant portraiture for all time, whereby perfection in dress appears to be devoid of self-consciousness in the wearing of it. His Dutch contemporaries could never achieve this, even in genre scenes peopled by folk supposedly unaware of being seen. Yet even in portraits of the most emblematic simplicity, with

their subjects' gaze riveted on the beholder, Van Dyck manages to make the modish clothing seem to have achieved elegance without effort, and to be subordinate to the personal perfections of the wearer. It is this ideal of a kind of divine ease which is reflected at about the same time in the verse of Cavalier poets. Herrick's famous "Delight in Disorder" is a reflection of the transition taking place in English fashion during the period in which it was written. By the third decade of the seventeenth century, the stiff, symmetrical, and confining style of dress characteristic of the late sixteenth century had largely given way to a looser mode, in which indefiniteness of form, assymetry and the random movement of cloth were appearing newly attractive by contrast. Taste had momentarily wearied of clear outlines and sharp distinctions in dress, and a new disarray was admired:

> A sweet disorder in the dress
> Kindles in clothes a wantonness.
> A lawn about the shoulders thrown
> Into a fine distraction;
> An erring lace, which here and there
> Enthralls the crimson stomacher;
> A cuff neglectful, and thereby
> Ribbons to flow confusedly;
> A winning wave, deserving note,
> In the tempestuous petticoat;
> A careless shoestring, in whose tie
> I see a wild civility;
> Do more bewitch me than when art
> Is too precise in every part.[4]

The sentiments expressed in Herrick's poem are not to be confused with those voiced in a recurrent literary convention which deplores Art, symbolized by tight-lacing, cosmetics and padding, and praises Nature, represented by flowing dress, loose hair and no makeup. The Herrick poem is an exhortation to be fashionable, rather than natural, to hasten the emerging trend which reached its height in the second half of the century as shown in the portraits of Lely and Kneller. These fashionable beauties are clad in negligée, their underclothing, jewelry, hair and dress all in mixed confusion. These paintings are difficult to interpret as records of actual practice, but they celebrate the evident delight currently being taken in the random sweep of

4 From *Hesperides* (1648), text modernized. In this connection, not only the equally famous "Upon Julia's Clothes," but Clerimont's song ("Still to be Neat, Still to be Dressed") from Ben Jonson's *Epicene*, and Lovelace's "To Amarantha, That She Should Dishevel Her Hair" come readily to mind.

cloth and the accidental counterpoint of flesh and fabric. Artificial aids to elegance had certainly not been abandoned: curls were wired to fall correctly, and stays were worn under the loose folds.

Such clothing in paintings must be distinguished from drapery *per se*, which has an expressive graphic life of its own. Drapery used on the figure exercises the same function as the swathed pictorial yardage used by so many painters since the sixteenth century for the purpose of theatricalizing portraiture, allegory and heroic or religious subject matter. Such drapery is emphatically not to be considered as clothing, since it is used to dress figures (as it may dress scenes) only for the sake of increasing their possibilities as elements in the composition, and not also to clothe characters in suitable garments. Many figures in the paintings of El Greco and Tintoretto wear this visionary cloth made into garments which have no discernible shape, no seams and no identifiable woven texture. Apparently such unspecific loose-draped garments have been considered traditionally correct for Biblical characters in art ever since the Counter-Reformation, when they became crystallized as attributes of saintliness and truth.

This drapery is not to be confused with actual clothes which use a great deal of draped cloth. Ecclesiastical vestments or Classical dress have conventional structures, although their drapery may be variously rendered. When they appear in pictures, of whatever style, they are intended to be recognized. Classical and ecclesiastical dress are frequently used in the earlier Renaissance, often combined with a theatrical version of Oriental dress. Meticulously rendered vestments are worn by angels in early Flemish pictures, and sumptuous clothes in fashionable style adorn many saints; but Old Testament characters and The Three Kings, who would not properly wear Christian clothes, appear in fanciful garments which often include a turban to denote the East and elaborate trappings unknown in common experience outside of the theatre. Classical garments were used by Italian Renaissance painters in mythological scenes with varying degrees of accuracy but with universal conviction. The figures in Botticelli's *Primavera* are wearing a version of Classical dress which is thoroughly realized though by no means archaeological in flavor. Such clothing in Italian pictures was chosen for the specific signals it conveyed. Erwin Panofsky acknowledges this in writing of the reintegration of Classical form with Classical subject matter: "When the Renaissance discarded the modish dresses in favor of Classical nudity or semi-nudity, it unveiled not only the nature of the human body

but also the nature of human emotions. It stripped man not only of his clothes but also of his protective cover of conventionality."[5]

Apart from traditions of allegorical portraiture, portraits were sometimes painted in the eighteenth century which rendered the subject in historic period costume, chosen evidently for charm and not for significance. *The Blue Boy* of Gainsborough, for example, is not wearing clothes fashionable for his time but an imitation of Cavalier clothing of more than a century earlier. So are Mrs. Graham and the Hon. Frances Duncombe in their portraits by Gainsborough. In a charming Fragonard painting in the Louvre called *l'Etude* (or *le Chant*) the lady is wearing early seventeenth-century costume, possibly in imitation of Rubens. Nineteenth-century artists with stylistic longings for high and far-off times produced many representations of historic dress from all periods, the fruit of much archaeological labor. Yet with or without attempts at historical accuracy, whatever the purpose of clothing figures in paintings differently from the contemporary dress, painters betray the ideal clothed image of their own moment. Many Pre-Raphaelite ladies who wear tight medieval clothes still show a suspicious rounding and smoothing of the pelvic area satisfying to mid-nineteenth century eyes.[6] (But not all: the invention of the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of bodily beauty, which has in reality no relation whatsoever to medieval types, is a remarkable and unprecedented creative act of nineteenth-century art.) So strong is the contemporary ideal vision of the clothed body that the presence of historical or allegorical dress in many paintings is often easy to overlook, no less in Italian Renaissance painters than in Gainsborough or Fragonard, unless the title of the picture intends to serve as a guide. The characteristic style of the time, not only in artistic convention but in dress, is so inevitably marked in the lines of the clothed figure, the pose of the body and the set of the head, that we often assume the garments to be contemporary with them. A beholder from the same period would notice fancy or old-fashioned costume immediately, and be unaware of how perfectly his own period was expressed in the clothed figure, whatever historical finery might be superimposed upon it.

Baudelaire, writing in praise of Constantin Guys in 1860,[7] deplores the use of historical dress in academic paintings, calling it a form

5 Erwin Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton, 1943), I, 33.

6 For example, Sir John Everett Millais' *Mariana*, painted in 1851 (reproduced in Jeremy Maas, *Victorian Painters* [New York, 1969], p. 139.)

7 Charles Baudelaire, "*Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*" (published in *Le Figaro* in 1863). In *Oeuvres Completes*, Pleiade ed. (Paris, 1961), pp. 1152-92. For the attack on historical dress, see p. 1163.

of laziness not to attempt to distill the beauty of contemporary fashion and make it eternal as did the great portrait artists of the past. He does not develop the idea still further, however, to be able to say that even the works of those painters who do dress their figures in historic costumes, ignoring the esthetic lessons of modern fashion, cannot in fact recapture and convey the style of other days, but succeed only in looking emphatically of their own time, even to the point of not appearing to have borrowed at all. They have indeed distilled the humanity and beauty from the contemporary ideal in spite of themselves. This contemporary ideal is expressed, as Baudelaire also points out, by the style of gesture and posture appropriate to the dress and without which it has no life. Painters using historical dress hang it upon bodies which sit and stand in ways that may seem basically human and natural to the painter's eye (and therefore appropriate to any costume) but which in fact are limited by the ideal of his own day, a concept of natural bodily movement inextricable from its clothing.

It is only through the medium of art that the animation of past styles may be recaptured. No surviving costume itself can convey its proper effect in context. The need for the filter of art is essential, even for recent times from which actual examples are plentiful. Garments displayed in exhibits, even on specially constructed mannequins, are never completely satisfactory without an accompanying display of pictures showing both the loftiest and most vulgar versions of contemporary clothed images, so that some sense of the animating self-awareness of the actual wearers may be felt. Distrusting the idea that clothes make the man, Thoreau remarks, "We are amused at beholding the costume of Henry VIII or Queen Elizabeth, as much as if it was that of the King and Queen of the Cannibal Islands: all costume, off a man, is pitiful or grotesque. It is only the serious eye peering from and the sincere life passed within it which restrain laughter and consecrate the costume of any people."[8] Under that "serious eye," the "sincere life" is always expressed in a sequence of physical movements inseparable from the clothing.

This interacting combination of bodily shape, movement and dress, presented in the awareness of some paradigm, is what forms the characteristic physical look of any period. Movies offer an excellent display of these phenomena, since film acting, at least in America, consists of the intensification of natural behavior rather than the assumption of a personality totally separate from the actor's. In the

8 Henry David Thoreau, "Economy," in *Walden* (1854). Quoted from the Modern Library Edition (New York, 1937), p. 23.

case of Hollywood films from thirty and forty years ago the characteristic movements which match the garments are as recognizably dated as the clothes and hair. But historically dressed film productions of those years, however elaborate the attempt at period flavor, always manage to look equally dated, chiefly because the self-awareness of the actors is out of synchronization with the clothes. A theatrical designer, working as he must from pictures to create a sense of period will have no success without the cooperation of the actors, who must take on not only the heavy skirts or sword-belts, but the entire consciousness of self required by the costumes—in short, they must look at the same pictures.[9] The appearance of an actor who likes the feel of his cape is quite different from the look of a man accustomed to wearing one. The esthetic authority of pictures or films may not be questioned, since they represent ideal images even unwittingly. Pictures can clearly prove, for example, that it was considered ideally correct during some periods to behave with considerable limitation and formality of movement while wearing tight, heavy garments, but during others to assume poses and gestures of great nonchalance and freedom while wearing clothes actually no less confining and elaborate. Fashionable people in Elizabethan England appear to have thought of themselves as straight-backed and straight-forward-gazing, inclining their heads and using their hands only with restraint; whereas fashionable people in mid-eighteenth-century France, wearing corsets and sleeves as tight and yardage as ample as the Elizabethans, yet preferred to think of themselves as constantly in graceful motion, gesturing with emphasis or abandon, turning their heads over their shoulders and leaning their bodies at sharp angles. One must assume the connection between the pictures and the people to have been the same in all periods before films as it has been since: *that the process of putting on and wearing clothes is like the individual performance of a canonical work, or the recitation of a standard text.*

III. Dressing an Image

Any ideal of clothed perfection which requires the look of relaxation and freedom is harder to achieve in actual practice than any other, since a satisfactory look of casual artlessness in dress, particularly when attempted in a context of complex, unconfining clothes,

9 In a recent (1970) costume epic called *Cromwell*, Alec Guiness as Charles I had obviously studied every available portrait of that monarch by Van Dyck and others: alone among all the actors, he appeared completely at home in the clothes and at ease in the gestures.

is always accomplished by an intense and concentrated effort. Actual lack of self-awareness in reality detracts from a look of clothed completeness and produces a noticeable uneasy disharmony. Once a human being is sophisticated enough to associate images in mirrors or in pictures with his own appearance, or to see in another person either a living picture or a mirror, he can no longer possess total unselfconsciousness about clothing. Even very young children are keenly aware of how their clothing *looks* and not only how it *feels*. We are all frequently unselfconscious, but seldom during the act of dressing. Our bodies are more totally themselves, more realized, when they are dressed than when they are nude. It is a recognized aberration from common impulse to be a nudist, since for most people nudity provides incomplete versions of themselves. Apart from erotic situations, accepting oneself completely while naked takes an enormous effort of will. Nudity functions as one form of dress, both in art, as has already been suggested, and outside of it. When putting on clothing, one is aware not of adding artificial coverings to a biological shape, but rather of finishing the creation of the natural self. The satisfaction to be drawn from dressing comes from the degree to which one has copied in one's own person some kind of Platonic paradigm of a clothed self. This self, it has been suggested, is assembled from contemporary pictorial elements in the life of any historical period, which in turn embody its esthetic ideals.

Other people necessarily have served the same purpose as pictures when they have been observed only for what they are wearing, and how well its effect has been achieved. This effect is constantly being measured against pictorial versions and against similar attempts the observer is engaged in making, with due regard for the immediate circumstances which influence the choice of clothes. Such circumstances, such as weather or occupation, often appear to have only a limited power if they stand in direct opposition to the prevailing image. Medieval women working in the fields, churning butter, or minding sheep, wore long, full and even trailing garments and sleeves like ladies of rank; and serving-maids of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wore hooped petticoats like their mistresses despite any lack of convenience or possibility of danger.[10] The phenomenal accomplishments of nineteenth-century women were carried on in cumbersome layers of skirt and confining stays which appear to have encumbered and confined their activities not at all. Freezing weather has never deterred fashionable women from wearing low-necked

10 See Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, *Occupational Costume in England* (London, 1967), pp. 38-9, 210.

dresses or, recently, extremely short skirts, much to the amusement of many observers. Clothing has only occasionally and conditionally been worn for protection or warmth, and it has long been shown to serve other needs with much more general success. *Only when comfort and convenience are themselves in fashion, as has lately been the case, does clothing measure itself by those standards.* In speaking of "dressing" and "choosing" I am not at this moment attempting to describe the complex economic and characterological forces governing any given instance.[11] Clothing, so bound up with the ego, is important to everyone and of deep interest to many more people than is obvious. Fashion tends to be followed just as language is spoken, even if semi-voluntarily or minimally. It is of course led only by a few, but it is consistently noticeable to everyone in reasonably constant contact with society. Once elements of a particular mode have been observed, they make their distinct contribution to any individual sense of clothes. The act of dressing always responds to this consciousness of the fashion: wearing garments when they are fashionable, and then continuing to wear them when they are out of date, are conscious acts entailing awareness of the mode.

By following fashion I mean consciously shifting one's choice of clothing, even down to the smallest element, within the wide spectrum of what is economically available and the only slightly narrower one of what one considers to be acceptable. Fashion in dress is always fluid and shifting both in time and space, so that at any given moment many people are dressing differently from one another; but in a later period, all those differences will have noticeably altered according to a new set of conventions which will have developed from the previous ones. The Fashion is not what is created by designers, but simply what people wear. The more complex the civilization, the more complex the signals conveyed by dress and the more various the roles to be played through clothing.

IV. The Portrait in the Mirror

The following of fashion in dress at whatever level depends upon the ability to know how one looks. There is no satisfaction in adopting a new element of dress or even in continually reassuming customary ones without the authentication of the mirror, wherein one's choice

11 But see for example the standard work by J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London, 1930), as well as such sophisticated sociological discussions of the bases of fashion as Edward Sapir's article in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1931), VI, 139-44.

is reflected and confirmed. The looking-glass has been brought to optical perfection, after a long history dating from Greek and Etruscan antiquity. Early mirrors were small, polished metal disks, mounted inside the covers of boxes or equipped with handles, although a few Roman ones were evidently full-sized. In the Middle Ages mirrors began to be made of metal-backed glass, as they have been ever since; and mirrored reflections of lines, shapes, colors and textures may be accepted as truthful. *But a man face to face with his reflection, seeking to find out how he looks, is participating not in an empirical test but in an imaginative event.* The image reflected back to a mirror-gazer is the reverse of that seen by another person, and thus an automatic perversion so profound as almost to need discounting. A mirror will also reflect the customary static pose assumed by anyone who looks in it. Such posing is by definition a distortion of actual behavior, which normally consists of a shifting flow of movement and facial expression. Mirrors only reflect unstudied movement when the subject is not posing for his own observation. While it is being observed, the image reflected in a mirror is a visionary self-portrait which has been generated in the imagination beforehand, and which may be created and re-created at will. The materials of which it is composed are visual facts, but the total image is a fiction.

The impulse to identify oneself in a reflected image is apparently profoundly human, and so basic is the satisfaction in it that, like erotic gratification, it has come to be the source of the deepest kind of misgiving and guilt. Rather than simply remaining an agent of human self-awareness, the mirror has come to be considered an instrument of evil, used chiefly in the service of vanity. The innocence of Milton's Eve, for example, is most sharply illustrated by the fact that, before the Fall, she is shown as uniquely permitted to observe her own reflection without prior knowledge that it is herself she sees:

> I thither went
> With unexperienc't thought, and laid me down
> On the green bank, to look into the clear
> Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another Sky.
> As I bent down to look, just opposite,
> A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd
> Bending to look on me, I started back,
> It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,
> Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love. . . . (*Paradise Lost*, IV, 456-465)

Milton begins her account of this adventure already expressing the basic lie of mirrors ("Lake, that to me seem'd another Sky"). The creature in the lake captivates her with its beauty—a seduction of innocence by falsehood—until she is taught that the image is her own creation:

> there I had fixt
> Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,
> Had not a voice thus warn'd me, What thou seest,
> What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself,
> With thee it comes and goes. . . . (465-9)

That image's only reality is what she lends it. It has no authority as a natural phenomenon, a God-created thing, just as the lake is not the sky but a false vision. Eve is led away from self-contemplation as soon as she discovers it, and made to embrace Adam, a corporeal image of herself—"true," but not, she confesses, so beautiful as the false one in the lake: "less fair / Less winning soft, less amiably mild, / Than that smooth wat'ry image." She is caught permanently, despite her dutiful rejection of "beauty" for "manly grace," in the trap of the eye, the image-making impulse:

> with that thy gentle hand
> Seiz'd mine, I yielded, and from that time see
> How beauty is excell'd by manly grace
> And wisdom, which alone is truly fair. (488-91)

She embraces her husband "with eyes / of conjugal attraction unreprov'd." She can "see" with willful comprehension, but her eye is unsatisfied.

One of Milton's models is Ovid's similar description of Narcissus and his reflection,[12] where the youth also admires the image without knowing that it is himself. It is not accurate to say that he falls in love with himself, or with what he knows himself to look like, but only with the beautiful image, the picture his gaze has generated. Unlike Eve, he has no divine guide to warn and instruct him (he is unaware of Tiresias' prophecy that he will die when he comes to know himself); and when he discovers that his beloved is his own reflection, he cannot bear it and must die. His death comes not from self-love, but from the revelation that the beautiful stranger he loves is a fiction of his own making.

These two examples of mirror-gazing, one Arcadian and the other unfallen, represent a kind of purity which is lacking in historical

12 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 407-503.

human beings who must knowingly regard their own images. It is only rarely possible to catch oneself unawares in a looking glass, and awareness follows so immediately that the fleeting vision is quickly erased by the adjusted image familiar to the conscious gaze. (There has been at least one suggestion about the fate of these residual glimpses. It appears in an aphorism of Lichtenberg: "Seeing ourselves in dreams comes from seeing ourselves in the mirror at times without thinking that it is in the mirror. But in dreams the image is more vivid, and conscious thinking is slighter."[13] The image is more vivid because in dreams, not as in mirrors, it is permitted to endure, and the unguarded view of the self may have life.)

As they gaze on their reflections, part of the innocence of Eve and Narcissus is expressed by their unconscious nudity, which is explicit in the case of Eve, but certainly implicit in the Narcissus story. In the fallen state, self-awareness and self-adornment must justify the use of mirrors: the image of naked Eve gazing with artless affection on her own beauty gives way to that of Venus in pearls and perfume, confirming with divine confidence the knowledge of her power in the depths of the glass. This image is most familiar in high-Renaissance paintings; but one literary satirical version of it occurs in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*:

> And now, unveiled, the Toilet stands displayed,
> Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.
> First, robed in white, the Nymph intent adores,
> With head uncovered, the Cosmetic powers.
> A heavenly image in the glass appears,
> To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
> Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
> Trembling, begins the sacred rites of Pride.
> Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and hear
> The various offerings of the world appear;
> From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
> And decks the Goddess with the glittering spoil. (I, 121-132)

Belinda at her dressing-table is a priestess at an altar, where she fulfills her sacred function by adorning her own person. Her reflected image in the looking-glass, however, is the very goddess who is being served: just as in a pagan temple, the figure over the altar is both image and deity, and while the woman is human, her reflection is divine.

A haunting vision of Venus' power apprehended through the use of

13 G. C. Lichtenberg, *Aphorisms and Letters*, trans. and ed. by Franz Mautner and Henry Hatfield (London, 1969), p. 50.

the mirror is created by Velasquez, in the painting in the National Gallery in London known as the *Rokeby Venus*. In this painting the slender, reclining nude figure is seen from behind, the face invisible. In the center of the picture, on her bed, rests a mirror supported by Cupid, who holds it at such an angle that the face of Venus may be seen both by the beholder and the goddess herself. Mortals, who may not look directly at divine beauty, are thus permitted to see her reflection; and love here provides the means, since in this picture Venus herself does not touch or gesture toward the glass at all. Her pose is neutral, even indifferent, and her shadowy gaze as we see it in the mirror is indeterminately directed, perhaps back into her own eyes, perhaps out of the picture into ours. Her faint, blurred smile is inscrutable and compelling. Cupid looks at her with a vague and bemused expression and holds the mirror without flourish, like a patient servant.

The serious, unrhetorical quality of this picture lends strength to the suggestive use of the looking-glass. The averted face of Venus and her lack of vigorous sensual equipment, so familiar in Rubens's Venuses of roughly the same date, further emphasize the central, potent mirror as the source of her power.

The looking-glass is the touchstone of that act of faith which dressing represents. One believes that the living, shifting surface, which is framed like a painting, is always a potential instant masterpiece—a moment of perfection in the constantly renewed cycle of self-creation. It is by virtue of such a visionary impulse that dressing may be called an art. Its own mirror in history is art itself, where in the whole panorama of clothed and nude figures the ideal appears perpetually, both reflected and generated.

Baudelaire, who remains the most impressive nineteenth-century critic writing on this subject, was also the first to take fashion plates seriously and to recognize their unique importance in the history of taste. It is while writing about a set of these that he observes:

> The idea of beauty which man creates for himself imprints itself on his whole attire, crumples or stiffens his dress, rounds off or squares his gesture, and in the long run even ends by subtly penetrating the very features of his face. Man ends by looking like his ideal self.[14]

Baudelaire is convinced that the chief function of cosmetics, ornaments and dress is not to give vanity its desired scope but to assist in the realization of the ideal:

14 Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London, 1964), p. 2.

> I am thus led to regard external finery as one of the signs of the primitive nobility of the human soul. Those races which our confused and perverted civilization is pleased to treat as savage, with an altogether ludicrous pride and complacency, understand, just as the child understands, the lofty spiritual significance of the toilet.[15]

Finally, and more specifically:

> Fashion should thus be considered as a symptom of the taste for the ideal which floats on the surface of all the crude, terrestrial and loathsome bric-a-brac that the natural life accumulates in the human brain: as a sublime deformation of Nature, or rather a permanent and repeated attempt at her *reformation*.[16]

Clothes thus make of everyone an artist whose goal is a perfect performance. In the act of dressing, the relationship between personal choice and the esthetic standards expressed in fashion exhibits the same connection between tradition and the individual talent that we have come to associate with the poetic act.

15 Baudelaire, p. 32.
16 *Ibid.*