

**FASHION IN BAD FAITH:
FRAMING THE CLOTHED SELF IN AN EXISTENTIAL
PHENOMENOLOGICAL LENS**

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ABSTRACT

This project outlines, through a discussion of Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of sadistic and masochistic manifestations of embodiment as forms of bad faith, relationships to clothing, especially those conditioned by the fashion industry. Through an analysis of the concept of a disguise, I argue that the fashion industry encourages consumers to play what I call a game of fashion. This game involves hiding from one's freedom through self-deception while interacting with seemingly replaceable others. Clothing enables one to engage in a two-fold disguise – hiding one's freedom from oneself and evading intersubjective relations with others. In bad faith, one wears the self falsely while immersing oneself in a game of false interactions with others.

Bad faith is a two-fold assault on the self and the basic make-up of social life. Within the contemporary milieu of Western consumer society, fashion is a ready accessory for the performance of bad faith. This study is an examination of such phenomena.

A contemporary attitude toward clothing, or fashion, is that particular garments are able to “remake” the self – as if what adorns the body were all there is – and that it can hide the self through such adornment because the “real self” supposedly exists elsewhere. This perspective on fashion, and by extension, the body, depends on a Cartesian severing of mind and body – the exact attitude that informs bad faith. These two approaches to fashion are examples of assertions of the self as a material thing on one hand and the assertion of the self as a complete transcendence on the other. Both are forms of bad faith.

Instead of thinking of fashion as a mask beneath which there is either nothing or the body beyond which there is the real transcendent self, I argue for thinking of clothing as a

veil where the garment naturally conceals through acts of revelation, but what is concealed and what is revealed are never complete. Such a conception involves maintaining a distinction between public and private, while acknowledging there being something beneath that could be known and, through the cultivation of intersubjective relations, offer a richer understanding of the ways in which clothing affects intimate relationships.

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PREFACE

Henry David Thoreau once said: “Beware all enterprises that require new clothes and not, rather, a new wearer of clothes. If there is not a new man, how can the clothes be made to fit?” This quote perfectly summarizes the dubious nature of clothing. Thoreau is urging us to change the man, not the clothes. This suspicion about clothing – one that philosophers, Thoreau, and myself all share – is that fashion offers the *illusion* of a changed man – as if changing the clothes could somehow express a fundamental change within. This idea expresses the heart of my interest in fashionable clothing in particular and the performance of the self more generally.

In her article “Dressing Down Dressing Up” philosopher Karen Hanson tells us that philosophy has disdained fashion for three primary reasons: constant change, feminine associations, and the fact that fashion evokes desire. It’s precisely this general neglect or disregard of fashion in philosophy that has fueled my continued interest in clothing as a possible area of philosophical inquiry. One of the many legacies of Plato is the idea that philosophy is the practice of dying – freeing the mind or the soul from the body. But these walking dead must still live in the world.

As our world becomes increasingly technologized and commodified it feels at times as if we have turned ourselves into objects. Fashion, as an arena that reflects both an intense consumerist mentality as well as a rate of change comparable to technology, is an aspect of modern life that shouldn’t be ignored. I am really most especially interested in how objects mediate our most intimate and loving relationships. While the project at hand is really the first step towards an analysis of the effect of mediation and narcissism

on relationships, I do think that Sartre's examination of interpersonal relationships under the lens of bad faith enables us to think of fashion as a significant area of concern. As I argue in the pages that follow, I do not think we should be so wary of fashion that we toss it out altogether. I do not think we can say dress doesn't matter. But I also don't think we can say dress matters too much – as one would in the spirit of seriousness.

The sort of unbridled greed and narcissism that now plaques many of our social endeavors has led to a certain kind of hubris. Ultimately, I am interested in the ethical ramifications of these kinds of missteps – or misunderstandings – in the construction of the contemporary self. Looking ahead, I see the issue of sustainability as it relates to consumerism as a particularly intriguing area of study. Especially as it relates to fashion, sustainability is the place where the philosophical and definitional question comes to bear on the ethical – how do we treat others, how do we clothe ourselves in a way that preserves ourselves and others. Sustainability is really about empathy – an idea that has interested me throughout my studies in philosophy.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

“Deceit wears a thousand masks.”
Montaigne

Clothing is an essential component of functioning in human societies. Few completely ignore the social demands of wearing a shirt, pants, and shoes. However, the multitude of ways in which individuals live out these dictates of civility begs for attention. Looking closely at clothing, as a cultural symbol and “second skin” worn most intimately next to the body, reveals much regarding the ways in which individuals live out their freedom.

This philosophical study builds upon Jean-Paul Sartre’s early thought to offer a critical examination of contemporary western conceptions of clothing. To that end, I lay out an existential phenomenological account through a discussion of Sartre’s concept of bad faith in order to set the stage for an extended conversation concerning clothing – a multi-dimensional product of the material world, yet one that resides in a liminal and intensely personal space – and the ways it informs some of western civilization’s most closely held ideas about the self.

On the surface, to even suggest a “philosophy of clothing” implies an overcoming of certain rationalist interpretations of the body. Recognizing the value and importance of the body, or rather, the appearance of the body, also involves implicitly acknowledging that the body is a significant component of the way in which a person is known in the

world. Likewise, it may seem that anyone who wears clothing is implicitly acknowledging the social significance of the body and the fact that embodiment is an essential component of being-in-the-world. However, this apparent acceptance of the body as lived is only skin-deep. It may be more accurate to say that those who concern themselves with clothing may do so for a variety of reasons – some revealing just as much disdain or confusion regarding their relationship to the body as the person who eschews clothing entirely.

Although clothing is often regarded as uniquely revealing of the self, there are many senses in which clothing can be worn as a masquerade, as an aid in deceiving others, and, in so doing, deceiving oneself. This deceptive element of clothing raises the question of bad faith.

In disguise, one plays a game of fashion. Within the game, one hides freedom from oneself while interacting with seemingly replaceable others. Clothing enables one to engage in a two-fold disguise – hiding freedom from oneself and hiding from one's intersubjective relations with others. Where the clothed appearance collapses into the presumed notion of the self, one *wears* the self falsely before the self while simultaneously immersing the self in a game of false interactions with others. Bad faith then finds in itself a contradiction where the very relationships it depends on are made unavailable. It is not only a position that prevents the very intersubjectivity which it craves (for being-with-others is a prerequisite for self-reflective existence), but it denies the unified nature of the self as an embodied freedom in finitude. So, in essence, bad faith is a two-fold assault on the self and the basic make-up of social life. Within the contemporary milieu of materialism and consumer society, fashion is a ready accessory

for the working out of such forms of bad faith. In the following chapters, I hope to expose the specific manner in which this relationship to the self is manifested in the ways we relate to clothing.

A Brief History of Fashion

History is ripe with examples of how human beings have protected, distorted, or enhanced their bodies – from the kohl covered eyes of the ancient Egyptians to the armor of Medieval knights to the corsets and voluminous skirts of Marie Antoinette. The covering of the body has always been wrought with delight and difficulty. Ever since the days of the phrenologists – who believed that outward bodily characteristics were indicative of inward dispositions of character – something about the body and body coverings have intrigued and confounded us. Especially during the Victorian era, dress, clothing, and bodily habits took on even more significance as the people of this time adopted an extreme sort of love/hate relationship to the body (akin to a bad faith attitude). This is demonstrated in the clothes of the era that are characterized by oddly concealing yet uniquely form-fitting styles.

The rise of the dandy in a figure like Beau Brummell of the 1890's illustrated the intense focus on clothes and grooming habits as an indicator of one's individuality. The dandy was thought of as a person whose concerns were solely aesthetic. And yet he was the quintessential modern individual – self-possessed, embodied, and intensely aware of the gaze of others.

With the creation of the sewing machine in the early 1900's, mass production of clothing changed everything in fashion. Now "ready-to-wear" replaced couture as the ultimate sartorial symbol. Women were able to dress identically to one another – allowing a new sort of democratic spread of trends to take hold. The French department store Bon Marche and New York's Macy's allowed for even more autonomy in the selection of an individual's clothed performance.

But couture (or high fashion) as we know it today mostly began as a result of Charles Frederick Worth. Worth was English, yet he established his business in Paris – the perennial capital city of fashion. Worth really catapulted fashion into a high art form and successful business venture instead of just a pursuit defined by small-scale craftsmanship. Comparable to Charles Worth in the world of couture were Yves Saint Laurent and Coco Chanel – designers' whose names and legacies still have a strong foothold in the world of fashion. In 1947, Christian Dior introduced his "New Look" in which long full skirts with nipped-in waists recreated the fashionable silhouette – and in effect, the female body. Gone were the corsets and crinolines of the previous centuries. Here was the real Modern Woman.

Starting in the mid-1940s and 50s, fashion in both Europe and America was dictated almost exclusively by the notion of Hollywood glamour. The screen sirens and their leading men, early celebrity incarnations, influenced styles at all economic levels. The 1960s and 70s brought the hippie movement, while although decidedly "anti-fashion," actually influenced fashion in many ways. Hippies especially encouraged individual expression and creativity with garments and fabric. As a result, tie-dye, denim, and bohemian floral dresses will always serve as fashionable inspirations.

Extreme wealth dominated the decade of the 1980s and brought with it designers demanding ludicrous prices for fashion items – the supermodels of the era only amped up the interest in runway shows as a place to display one’s status as part of the fashionable elite. Donna Karan in the United States re-dressed the career businesswomen as Ralph Lauren continued to define classic American style.

In the contemporary moment, however, we are dealing with a kind of fragmented fashion – where what is fashionable is no longer defined by one set of couture houses or one particular city such as Paris or New York. As fashion constantly repeats itself, it seems as if everything is a pastiche. And the spectacular and performative element of fashion is greater than ever. In the late 20th century the catwalk competes with street style as many individuals dress for everyday as if they were performing on the runway. The obsession with celebrity (and celebrity narcissism) has led wannabe fashionistas to dress as if they are celebrities – even people who will never get within miles of a red carpet. In western culture, fashion, or an awareness of fashion, has become all-pervasive.

Alexander McQueen

The recent flurry of interest surrounding the late designer Alexander Lee McQueen uniquely sets the stage for the discussion at hand. As a kind of beloved rebel in the fashion industry, McQueen was able to simultaneously highlight the best and the worst of fashion in his collections – but most importantly for our purposes, he

represented bad faith.

The recent retrospective exhibition of McQueen's work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City broke attendance records of all kinds for a costume exhibition, with people waiting outside for hours in lines just for a chance to see his famed pieces. The museum extended the show and even kept the exhibition open until midnight on the two nights before the exhibition closed permanently.¹ Over half a million people saw the show.

But why is McQueen so compelling? How could it be that a fashion designer, of all things, can draw crowds to a museum surpassing those who would come to see a show of Picasso's work? Is the sometimes raunchy, perpetually transgressive fashion designer McQueen now a household name?

I mention all of this because in many ways the work of Alexander McQueen highlights all of the most poignant aspects of the bad faith dilemma I'll be discussing throughout this study. His obsession with the body as something to be reckoned with is evident not only through his choice of fashion as his particular creative medium, but also through the ways in which his garments distort and rewrite the dimensions and shapes of the body. Significantly, his clothes allude to animals or inanimate objects – constantly highlighting the simultaneous mutability and rigidity of the human form. Models wearing

¹ From *McQueen Almost as Good as Van Gogh* by Eric Wilson, *The New York Times* blog: "The Alexander McQueen retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art set an attendance record for the opening day of a Costume Institute exhibition — and nearly for the entire museum. The show had 5,100 visitors on Wednesday, beating out popular shows like the Jacqueline Kennedy and Chanel exhibitions, though time will tell if the numbers hold up for the duration of the show. The crowd was so large that the Met had to temporarily suspend its guided tours, a spokeswoman said. The museum sold 600 catalogs that day in its gift shop. Museumwide, the record for the biggest opening day still belongs to "Vincent van Gogh: The Drawings," which had about 5,400 visitors when it opened in 2005."

his designs are shape-shifters. Each piece almost seems to represent a hybrid being – a human non-human – playing upon the ability of fashion to re-inscribe what a body – or a human – should ultimately be. In that sense, one could call McQueen a philosopher – as his self-reflexive ruminations on what fashion is and isn't has ultimately redefined the very endeavor of fashion itself.

Isn't fashion that which makes us both intensely aware of our embodied nature and aware of aspirations to be that which we are not – perhaps even birds, tigers, robots, snakes? While one could argue that McQueen demonstrates these opposing views in each piece he designs, it is really the entire spectacle of his runway shows that enhances the insight that human beings long to be both a performer performing yet invisibly camouflaged within nature itself. The themes of his collections, ranging from the sea to robots, reveal his fascination with the duality of violence and romanticism – the raw body as a site of cruelty and the body as that which houses a deeply intuitive soul.

Visually, McQueen's garments are comprised of everything from oyster shells to blood covered medical slides, armor and scales to feathers and fur. He's constructed wings of the most delicate balsa wood, reminding the viewer of a fan with its pleasing symmetry of design. Yet some of his loveliest dresses have bodices that become straightjackets, twisting the arms across the front and behind the back. He incorporates football helmets and shoulder pads into outfits decorated with the finest Japanese embroidery. Either extremely ethereal and "otherworldly" – as in the exquisite silk organza ruffled dress worn by a Kate Moss hologram – or very permanent and present – as the sculpted leather bodices skirted with horsehair – his work is always playing with duality. Delicate silk screen printing goes with highly polished metallic scaling. Intricate

beadwork goes over rough suede. Everything is a dance of opposites – aesthetically projecting the human dilemma of being caught between being an object (of another’s gaze) or a subject (of one’s own making).

His role as a creator of forms never escaped McQueen. “I like to think of myself as a plastic surgeon with a knife,” he said.² The sadistic desire to cut away, to reshape what is, undergirds all of his pieces, and his personal fascination with the Victorians is evident in many of his collections, most notably in “Highland Rape” (1995). It’s no wonder that the Victorian era held a special appeal for McQueen as the Victorians’ own simultaneous disgust and obsession with the body echoes his own.

It’s worth noting that suicide for many is the ultimate act of freedom. But was it for McQueen? Or was it his finally acquiescence to a body that enslaved him in a way he couldn’t understand? What does it mean to turn one’s own body against oneself – to be so divorced from one’s self that a person could serve as his own murderer? While the fact of McQueen’s suicide isn’t discussed aside from muttered words of regret, I do think it is a regretfully fitting conclusion to the kind of fashion he designed.

To turn one’s freedom against oneself is a perfect illustration of bad faith. McQueen then in every way – in his philosophy, his fashion, his life and his death – demonstrates the vivid outworking of bad faith in relationship to fashion. As a representative example of the human relationship to clothing, most specifically illustrated in the multi-billion dollar industry of fashion, McQueen is the ideal springboard from which to move into a discussion of bad faith and fashion.

² Exhibition note, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Bad Faith

As the term itself implies, Sartre's idea of bad faith is most fundamentally an issue of misplaced investment or belief. By investment, I mean that to which we are attached or in which we have placed value. As belief, it is also a reminder of its fragile relationship to knowledge, for to recognize a belief as belief means to admit an element of doubt. Because of that, belief brings with it the question of whether to believe what we believe, to invest, in other words, in our belief. This means, then, that where there is good reason not to believe what we claim to believe, we in effect invest in false beliefs; we make ourselves believe what we do not believe. This aspect of belief echoes our relationship to faith, since the latter requires investing ourselves in what could only be accepted by virtue of our willingness to believe it. Such an act of investment affects the portrait of our selves.

Bad faith is also an affirmation of, or a faith in, the self as only one aspect of the *for-itself*, the Hegelian term Sartre uses for consciousness. In Sartre's view, consciousness is fundamentally free, but it is a freedom that implies a responsibility to choose – one's self, one's actions, and, through the narrative that unfolds from one's actions, one's life. This constellation of activities constitutes a portrait of human existence as meaningful. A person, thing, or event may only have meaning against the backdrop of what Sartre calls our projects. These are the organizing purposes or aims that bring meaning to our existence. Each individual faces responsibility, as a manifestation of freedom, for the response she or he makes to the circumstances of his or her life. But we face this responsibility simultaneously in what Sartre calls our facticity

and our transcendence:

[Bad faith] is a certain act of forming contradictory concepts which unite in themselves both an idea and the negation of that idea. The basic concept [of bad faith] utilizes the double property of the human being, who is at once a facticity and a transcendence. These two aspects of human reality ought to be capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them nor to surmount them in a synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences.³

Most fundamentally, “the ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I am a transcendence in the mode of being a thing.”⁴ What Sartre means by this is that it is an assertion of being-for-itself in the form of being-in-itself; it is the assertion of a non-thing as a thing. It is thus the assertion of a falsehood about being-for-itself. This act is one of denial, where the basic unity of consciousness is an inherently flawed view of the self, one that sees the self as split (with each part of the “real” self elsewhere). R.D. Laing refers to this split as the “divided self.”⁵ The bad faith lie, which is turned onto the self instead of like an ordinary lie, one that focuses on offering false information to others with a lucid awareness of its falsity, is not only a fundamental “fleeing” of the self, but also a splitting of the self in a lie that implies a notion of “otherness” even at the very core of our being. As Sartre writes, “It must affirm facticity as being transcendent and transcendence as being facticity, in such a way that at the instant which a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other.”⁶

³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Anthropology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 162.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵ R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1969.)

⁶ Sartre, 162.

There are several challenges at the heart of bad faith. Three primary concerns particularly inform a discussion of bad faith: knowing the other as a subjectivity equal to the self, reconciling two existing freedoms, and knowing the self in light of the other.

Within the phenomenological tradition, which situates Sartre's analysis, thinkers have wrestled with incorporating sociality into their portrait of human existence. That tradition is premised on the insight that consciousness is always *of* an object. What happens, however, when another consciousness is posed? That consciousness could only emerge, in phenomenological terms, as an object of consciousness as well, which cancels its status as consciousness. In other words, the social world requires relationships between at least two consciousnesses, which in turn hold the possibility of relationships across a multitude of consciousnesses. But this presents a greater problem: if I encounter others as merely objects, how am I to know that I myself am not only an object? Even worse, how do I allow for others who experience the world legitimately as I do if I encounter them as things? Does this mean that I may only legitimately assert my existence, my point of view, in a solipsistic, narcissistic world of myself and no others? Others, after all, as other human beings, are, if they are like me, conscious. But how do I justify that judgment or expectation of what they are in relation to me?

Edmund Husserl's answer in his *Cartesian Meditations* was that we must first understand the self in relational and analogical terms and then analyze the existence of the other as a flesh-and-blood encounter with alterity.⁷ His argument moved to a form of transcendental argumentation, where the very concept of the Other must be a necessary and sufficient condition for the establishment of the self. More radically, the

⁷ See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), see the 5th Meditation.

transcendental phenomenological philosophical exercise showed, in Husserl's view, that there could be no *reflective consciousness*, the consciousness involved in the questioning of the other, without a sense of its own otherness, which requires at least a vicarious relationship to the Other. Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, took a different approach. Instead of beginning with the self placed outside of the relationship with the Other and then work back to the Other, he posed the ontological question of the subject Dasein (being-there) as already situated as a *mitsein* – being-with-others.⁸ In contrast to René Descartes's solitary thinking ego of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* and Husserl's transcendental ego reaching back to the Other in a transcendental realm, Heidegger's Dasein is by definition and most essentially in a world of others. Intersubjectivity, even where not rigorously grounded, is for these thinkers a basic aspect of human consciousness.

Husserl's and Heidegger's predecessor Hegel had, however, raised some additional considerations to which Sartre later turned his attention. For Hegel, the discussion is complicated by the concern that human beings actually depend on recognition from each other for the formation of self-consciousness.⁹ As Robert Ehman writes in his essay "Subjectivity and Solipsism": "In Hegel's view the problem is not merely epistemological but ontological and has to do with the realization of subjectivity

⁸ Martin Heidegger, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁹ Hegel explores this thesis in a variety of ways in his writings, but for my purposes, the main point is his continued insistence on the fundamentality of recognition. See his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

as an object. The objective realization of subjectivity consists in its being recognized, known, by another.”¹⁰

But for Sartre, while intersubjectivity is as much a basic fact of existence – as a large part of his overall philosophical project was to restore a sense of concreteness and contingency to consciousness, much of which has everything to do with social life in the world – it is also what enables all manners of self-denying attitudes toward the self.

Now we see the two aspects of human existence that uniquely set the stage for bad faith: freedom and intersubjectivity. Sartre argues that the fact of human freedom creates within an individual an avoidable sense of anguish. Although freedom should/could be viewed positively, the possibilities posed by freedom motivate bad faith. Implicit in freedom is *total freedom*, which many human beings experience as a condemnation: “I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free.”¹¹ In a sense, the desire to flee or run from freedom is as much a part of human consciousness as freedom itself. Sartre writes of the effort to avoid freedom: “Human reality may be defined as a being such that in its being its freedom is at stake because human reality perpetually tries to refuse to recognize its freedom.”¹² Facing freedom places human beings in anguish, the form of anxiety premised upon a confrontation with choice and the choices we can make in order to form our self. Anguish is initiated when an individual realizes that every available possibility she faces is *her* possibility.

The experience of anguish is exacerbated by encounters with the Other. As Ehman puts it: “The question haunts us as to whether the subjectivity of the other is really

¹⁰ Robert Ehman, “Subjectivity and Solipsism,” *Review of Metaphysics* 20, no. 1 (1966): 8.

¹¹ Sartre, 567.

¹² *Ibid*, 568.

the same as our own...”¹³ But if one begins to see the other as an all-encompassing being, one immediately begins to face the issue of conflicting freedoms. And upon facing the issue of two freedoms we have the choice to embrace the Other in both her subjectivity and objectivity (thereby causing the self to experience alienation) or, as we have seen in our discussion of Husserl, to view the Other as either only a subjectivity or only an object. It’s in viewing the other as strictly an object that we begin to enforce an instrumental view of others: “There seems no room for another universal field of consciousness; our own appears to be all-inclusive... The other seems to reduce to a member of an instrumental and social system within the broader horizon of our own world.”¹⁴ When faced with the freedom of the other, one could in one’s quest for recognition seek either to control that freedom through at first making oneself into an object for it (as in the case of the masochist) or forcing it to become an object under our mastery (as in the case of the sadist). Both, however, exemplify forms of failure through collapsing into the other, for to make the Other devote all attention to us, we must limit her focus in devotion to us. In effect, she collapses into a thing for us, which transforms our masochism into sadism. The same applies for sadism: to make oneself the only point of view requires erasing the Other’s point of view as such, but that would make one vulnerable to the Other’s capacity to look at us and thereby asserting her point of view. Eventually, the sadist’s dependency on controlling the Other’s look leads to her own enslavement by that Other. She becomes a thing, where sadism slides into masochism. An array of attitudes such as shame (the negative experience of ourselves in a form we

¹³ Ehman, 6.

¹⁴ Ehman, 7.

would prefer not exist before others) and guilt are fertile grounds for the blossoming of bad faith.

In addition to the problem of reconciling two conflicting freedoms, the existence of the Other also presents the issue of coming to understand the self as both subject and object, or so to say, compartmentalized or separated into parts. Echoing Hegel, only under the gaze of the Other may one begin to take an objectifying perspective on oneself.¹⁵ Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness*: “The consciousness of bad faith which has for its ideal a self-judgment – i.e. taking toward oneself the point of view of the Other.”¹⁶ Karen Green elaborates this insight of experiencing the other in her essay “The Other as Another Other”: “We have an immediate ontological apprehension of others in the experience of being looked at, which reduces us to an object for another. Our concrete relations with others are structured by the fact that our being for others is initially experienced as being an object for others.”¹⁷

Given this background discussion concerning the role of intersubjectivity in human existence, Sartre scholars have frequently discussed the question of whether or not bad faith is dependent upon the existence of others. The most commonly accepted response is yes. Bad faith is inherently a social phenomenon, dependent on the ways in which individuals construct social identities. According to Matthew Eshleman, Sartre’s account of intersubjectivity must precede an analysis of bad faith: “Others must objectify me before I can attempt a pseudo-objectification of myself and a complete analysis of bad faith must consider technical details of Sartre’s treatment of Others in the later portions of

¹⁵ In fact, in the latter part of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre allows that “the Other is the necessary condition of all thought which I would attempt to form concerning myself,” BN, 271.

¹⁶ Sartre, 528.

¹⁷ Karen Green, “The Other as Another Other” *Hypatia* 17, no 4 (Fall 2002): 1-15.

the text.”¹⁸ He continues: “Consciousness does not and cannot experience itself as it experiences Others. Nor can it objectify itself, even if only in a quasi manner, unless it has previously been objectified by Others.”¹⁹ It is only in the “mirror” of the Other that we see ourselves as objectively complete.²⁰ Ultimately, it is the existence of others and their perspective upon the self that serves as a given – a part of one’s facticity essentially beyond one’s control. It is true that some component of oneself exists in “the manner of the given,” but extending the notion of a given to many other aspects of the physical world becomes a materialization of value which is essentially a denial of freedom in a spirit of seriousness. This denial of freedom, or decision not to acknowledge or experience basic human freedom leads to a passivity on the part of the subject which in turn is bad faith. As Sartre says: “The Other moulds my being and makes me be, [the Other] confers value upon me and removes from me; and my being receives from it a perpetual passive escape from self.”²¹

Finally, and most significantly for my argument, an individual involved in a bad faith attitude may choose to subscribe to a standard or a system of limitation from which she could persuade herself of the absence, or even the impossibility, of her own freedom. As with masochism, this involves reducing oneself to one’s facticity, to make oneself into an object amid other objects, as a being-in-itself. In the context of fashion, for instance, one may see this kind of attitude in the manner in which many people subscribe to the fashion industry. Even one not immediately affected by the stricter dictates of fashion’s

¹⁸ Matthew C. Eshleman, “The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith, or Reading Being and Nothingness in Reverse,” *Sartre Studies International* 14, 2 (2008): 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8

²⁰ Cf. Debra Bergoffen, “Casting Shadows: The Body in Descartes, Sartre, de Beauvoir and Lacan,” *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* IV, no. 2–3 (1992): 232–243.

²¹ Sartre, 366.

“in-crowd” may still experience some kind of desire to be “in fashion.” She behaves as if this is a structure she must abide by, placed upon her without her control, when in reality she has every ability, in freedom, to choose not to be affected by such rules and/or dictates.

This materialization of value, which, drawing on the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sartre calls the spirit of seriousness, stems from recognizing a human being’s innate finitude – which is a kind of actual limit on human existence – yet the recognition is misplaced. “Bad faith plays on a genuine sense of limitation and (indirectly) misconstrues it in a deliberate act of willful ignorance.”²² Through a materialization of value, individuals engaged in bad faith assign themselves to a value system through which they could abrogate responsibility for their values. Applied to the materiality of clothing, the spirit of seriousness could take the form of understanding the self exclusively through one’s clothed physical appearance, where one *is* literally what one is dressed to be.

A person in bad faith does not simply ignore the balance between freedom and limitation. In some cases, an individual may recognize an inherent sense of limitation within freedom yet still have a false understanding of her relationship to it. A materialization of value represents this kind of misplaced, or falsely created, system of limitation. Through subscribing to this false materialization of value an individual becomes serious, as Simone de Beauvoir writes, and attempts to forget all ability to recognize freedom.²³

²² Eshleman, 4.

²³ I will discuss the spirit of seriousness at length in chapter two.

Bad Faith and Clothing

Although clothing is employed to protect the body from various environmental hazards, the primary psychological motivation behind the human use of clothing is to define ourselves and by defining, to differentiate. The activity of expressing and defining the self takes place in and through a world of others. The intersubjective element of self-creation through dress is connected to a fundamental aspect of human reality – namely, the human construction of reality through the production of meaning. Yet it is precisely this dimension of intersubjectivity that allows one to adopt a bad faith attitude. Recall serious sadism and masochism.²⁴ As forms of bad faith, their efforts to usurp intersubjective relations ironically depend on such relations. Both sadism and masochism are denials of sociality (in the same sense that they are denials of human freedom). Sartre’s critique shows that in denying another’s freedom, one denies the basis of human existence for oneself as well.

What specifically characterizes a bad faith attitude toward clothing is the idea that clothing can serve as a *complete* makeover, or that clothing is capable of *completely* transforming a person. *What* is being made over in a makeover? When this idea informs one’s perspective on clothing, I argue that the person is in bad faith. Although some people may not think of clothing in this manner, the unavoidable influence of social and commercial institutions prompts these questions about sociality, selfhood and bad faith. It’s for this reason that it seems valid to discuss the fashion industry, or fashionable

²⁴ I say “serious” because, as we will see, play is a suspension of seriousness, which would make playing at sadism and masochism different forms of activity than the ones of which Sartre was offering his critique.

clothing particularly, as it enables the distinct perpetuation of the idea of clothing as makeover.

Fashion involves clothing, a product of material culture that is inherently temporal and linguistically driven. Every garment designed and manufactured was once “in fashion” – even if only in the sense of serving as a suitable uniform for a certain job or as an appropriate indicator of regional dress. To speak of “fashion” is to speak of clothing that carries some weight, communicates something, to fellow human beings. While my argument is most fundamentally related to individual human beings and a general relationship to clothing as an extended form of embodiment, I will certainly tangentially address the fashion industry proper.²⁵ The millennial relationship to fashion, as a major branch of the western consumerism paradigm, also has much to offer an understanding of intersubjectivity as well as one's own freedom. Although limitations don't allow for an expansion of this argument to more general concerns of social life in consumer society, this project may lend a new perspective to such conversations, particularly those discussions begun by social theorists and philosophers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Charles Taylor, Christopher Lasch, Richard Sennett, and Robert Bellah (specifically *in Habits of the Heart*).

As fashion studies continues to grow as a distinct yet richly interdisciplinary field of research, a philosophical approach to clothing may prove vital. Additionally, philosophical phenomenological conversations concerning the limits and ramifications of

²⁵ As mentioned previously, the fashion industry is specifically connected to a notion of “fashion as makeover” – under which view clothing is seen as something that changes the nature of an individual, or “expresses” some truth about an inner self. This is the perspective that I see as infected with bad faith.

embodiment and intersubjectivity will benefit from the application of such concerns to clothing.

While my specific focus on (serious) sadism and (serious) masochism as two facets of bad faith may strike some as extreme or “on the fringe,” when one fully comes to understand the extremes one begins to see that the continuum isn’t really so wide after all. A study of the seeming “extremes” of human behavior and psychology can certainly shed light on the experiences of “everyday” individuals. It’s my hope that this study is one such insightful contribution, and these “extreme” bad faith manifestations may shed light on more everyday instances of bad faith relationships to material garments.

Clothing and Culture

In a set of cultures that urges us to search constantly for the self, we consistently put the self out of reach.²⁶ The bad faith of post-modernity, a swirling combination of consumerism and materialism, could be interpreted as an escape – a removal of the ability of ever reaching the self. Through our choices in dress, we present a self that we hope will be embraced by our selected audience. We wear particular items of clothing that serve as social cues to alert others of our desire to be included. This tendency is a confession of a desire to be accepted, but more fundamentally, this desire to be included could also be a desire for intimacy. Although self-sufficient forms of individualism are encouraged in much of contemporary western society, many of us yearn for a deep,

²⁶ Discussions of this aspect of modern western civilization are many. See, e.g., Charles Taylor’s very influential *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

intimate connection to others.²⁷ This urge for intimacy is expressed in many ways, particularly clothing.

Further connected to this narcissistic nature of fashion is an embodied confession of materialism. Materialism is an unavoidable fact of clothing. Clothing is literally material – textiles, fabric, material garments that cover our material bodies. And on top of this, those who care about staying “in fashion,” in the sense of following trends and styles, are often more materialistic. They may have more articles of clothing than are necessary in order to maintain their “fashionable” status.

Chapters Outline

In the next chapter, I will examine bad faith in relation to the body as mediated by clothing. Such a discussion will entail an analysis of the purposes and functions of clothing, and/or fashion, in society today, often calling upon the current literature surrounding clothing and its relation to the body and the social world. Most important, I will show how fashioned clothing is most essentially about group formation and self-identification, revealing the intersubjective nature of clothing and dress and why it especially lends itself to projects of bad faith.²⁸

²⁷ There are many recent discussions on the loss of intimacy. See, e.g., in philosophy, Edward F. Mooney, *Lost Intimacy in American Thought: Recovering Personal Philosophy from Thoreau to Cavell* (New York: Continuum International Publishers, 2009) and John Armstrong, *Conditions of Love: The Philosophy of Intimacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

²⁸ I say “fashioned clothing” since a purely functionalist approach of covering oneself is not necessarily fashion in the sense in which the term is commonly used. “Fashion” offers an aesthetic element in addition to a myriad of meanings that transcend the mere notion of function and object. The object of fashioned clothing could have multiple meanings beyond its immediate function.

Through another lens, clothing may be understood as uniquely about confession – a concept that is especially relevant in relation to bad faith because bad faith depends upon, and is structured by, anxieties over the revelation of the self, which, too, depends upon how one appears to others and dynamics of intersubjectivity. As well, fashion is peculiarly expressive; with fashion, we are always *saying something* in and through what we wear.

The third chapter is an examination of the masochistic aspect of bad faith. Masochism addresses the sociality of clothing and problem of self-deception primarily as seduction. The desire to seduce the other into forming a relationship premised upon deception forces an individual to assume a position of objectification, or over-identification with facticity. This effort of immersing oneself in social relations paradoxically eliminates the possibility of human relationships. A masochist is the narcissist who longs to be pure objectivity, or an object. She relies on self-constitution through recognition by the Other, which is why she invests so much time in mirroring and duplicating the look of the Other. Although there are sadistic forms of seduction, the masochist diminishes her own individuality by becoming a mirror of or for the other. In that form of seduction, the masochist evacuates herself of her own agency and transforms herself into a passive object, using dress to set up a mirror to draw others in. The individual appears to be a reflection of those she would like to seduce. She becomes a thing for the Other. As one of her tools, dress helps her pull others toward her.²⁹

In the fourth chapter, I will turn to the issue of sadism, the other side of masochism according to Sartre. The sadist is one who seeks such differentiation from

²⁹ I am intentionally using terms concerning love and intimacy. These two ideas are quite at the heart of this issue, a matter I will address in the latter part of this study.

others that she even desires to be free of her embodiment – to become a pure transcendence. For her, others are the objects and she adopts the perspective of the pure gaze. Invisibility and masquerade are sought in order to interact with others, and yet, there is a simultaneous repulsion at work.

Dress is at once a means of attracting others and repelling others. Our confessed longing for others is apparent in the replicating of the other through dress, but the seemingly unavoidable narcissism involved in dealing with one's body and dress (the awareness of "being seen," the longing to be admired, the selfishness of materialism – much of dressing involves looking at ourselves as we get ready, for instance), pushes others away while attracting them.

The fifth chapter will deal with the concept of play under the Sartrean framework and offer a solution to the manifestations of bad faith presented to that point. While clothing may be a means employed to seduce and repel others involving alternating techniques of imitation and disguise, there may be a way to offer the self, as clothed, as *more* transparent, or as a more wholly unified being of freedom – both subjectivity and transcendence.

I propose finally that thinking of clothing as a veil instead of a mask may offer some insight into how disguise or "hidden-ness" does not necessarily imply deceit. How does the idea of veil salvage the duplicitous nature of clothing? A mask is presented in a way that it is intended to disappear – a person wearing a mask is presenting herself *as* the truth of the mask. There is no acknowledgement of the nature of mask – the mask is taken as truth. In the case of a veil, in contrast, the concealing nature of the veil is so apparent that it can never be taken as the truth of appearance – the very presence of the veil

implies a different sort of “truth” beneath. So if clothing can be read as a veil rather than a mask, we may be able to take dress simultaneously more *and* less seriously.

The creative element of fashion is the final stage in acknowledging, accepting, and embracing the playful, imaginative elements of dress. The creation of a particular style of dress, which resonates with one’s uniqueness but which also echoes themes of a certain social group, is the ultimate goal in seeking a harmony between self and clothing, self and other. This allows one to utilize garments in a way that is detached from commerce and wholeheartedly committed to the individual, but still against the background of a certain context. It is freedom within bounds. It is the imagination floating in a playful way, running over patterns and relationships, but not worrying about any connection. It is looking at a collage and appreciating the comparisons. But it allows for the actual creation of relationship. In addition, such recognition of freedom implies an overcoming of the spirit of seriousness that plagues projects in bad faith. In reference to clothing more particularly, one may begin to see that “fashion” is a game that one chooses to play.

CHAPTER TWO:
BAD FAITH, THE BODY, AND CLOTHING

“The euphoria of fashion has its counterparts in dereliction, depression, and existential anguish. We encounter more stimulations of all sorts, but also more anxiety; we have more personal autonomy, but also more personal crises. Such is the greatness of fashion, which always refers us, as individuals, back to ourselves; such is the misery of fashion, which renders us increasingly problematic to ourselves and others.”

Gilles Lipovetsky

In bad faith, one lies to oneself about oneself. Consequently, the self presented in bad faith in the social world is built on a lie, and as such one lies to others about how one understands oneself. Within this complex of lies and deceit, bad faith enables an individual to close off the very social relations on which she depends. Three primary questions guiding a study of bad faith and clothing are:

1. What is clothing?
2. What distinct purposes do clothing and fashion appear to serve in society?
3. How is that apparent purpose really a form of self-deceit?
4. Is there a way to salvage the endeavor of fashion from the charge of deceit?

Clothing, the physical garments that one uses to cover the body, appear to serve as material means of self-expression. Theorists frequently speak of a “language of clothing.” Along with that, clothing may serve as particular indicators to specific “others” who belong to groups to which one wants to become a member. Yet, fundamentally, there is a

bad faith relationship at work. One appeals to others and longs for others as one simultaneously impedes connection to those others. Clothing is seemingly expressive, but is it actually deceptive? While many claim that they wear any variety of eccentric dress in an effort to “express” themselves, it may be more accurate to say that the self-expression in which they believe to engage is a particular brand of bad faith. Utilizing clothing (as a material object) to express a self (which presumably exists in some place below the surface, as in “inner self”) is to assume a level of “selfhood” beneath the sartorial performance. It is to perpetuate a relationship between the self and the material world – beginning with the body, extending to clothes – that denies the very freedom that defines human existence.

For Sartre, bad faith in relation to the body is the attitude that considers the “real self” as hidden; in other words, the self is not equal to the body. Instead, Sartre’s understanding is that the “self,” as “my” project chosen in freedom, is the ongoing narrative whose unifying movement is the body, the lived embodiment of our specific choices. The body for Sartre is the perspective, the point, through which any relation by which an object is identified is oriented. It is, in other words, the “here” that enables us to point to “there” or to “that,” the object. Without a “here,” we will be “nowhere.” Therefore, the body, as a “here,” by which we are also able to be (for another consciousness) a “there,” is a necessary condition of consciousness. To say or pretend that a “self” exists elsewhere from the body is to perpetuate a lie concerning the self, portrayed in bad faith. Essentially, for Sartre, “by the lie consciousness affirms that it exists by nature hidden from the Other”;³⁰ “consciousness affects itself with bad faith” – it is in essence a lie to the self about the relationship of the self to the self. Yet,

³⁰ Sartre, 150.

consciousness is primordially embodied, which makes the resistance to object-hood that much more difficult to achieve.

The body is the condition of one's lived experience. But it is also a crucial means of access to the social world. As with the here-there relation, the social world is one in which others are those who are *there*. The body is thus also a body-for-others. However, when one begins to experience the body as an essential mode of social engagement, one begins to experience a form of alienation – one senses one's own objectification that opposes the innate freedom of subjectivity characterizing human experience. Yet, it is only at this point of estrangement or alienation from the body that one can come to “possess” it, or make it one's own. Therefore, in this sense, the body is not only lived, but also owned. I live *my body*. Within this framework, one begins to view the body as a “project” – something to be improved upon, modified, made-up, and dressed-up.

Clothing then, as a physical component of this project, stops being simply a means of self-expression or creativity, but becomes instead a mode of improving upon a possession (the body as object) that is inherently lacking, or by implication, needs improvement. Here the body (and by extension, clothing) has become a “phenomenon of choices and options.”³¹ As Benjamin Kilborne put it in his book *Disappearing Persons*:

So just as nudity is not about nudity per se, so fashion is not about fashion per se. Nor is it clothes per se that make the man. Rather, the wearing of clothes in itself expresses an unstated conviction that we can “fashion” ourselves and our feelings, that we can make ourselves over. [...] that the stuff of personhood can be as malleable as the stuff of cloth.³²

³¹ Anthony Giddens. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 7.

³² Benjamin Kilborne. *Disappearing Persons: Shame and Appearance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 110.

To “makeover” one’s body through clothing, then, is in essence an attempt to makeover one’s self. But to think of the body as a project in this way implies a perspective in which the body is actually separate from the self – a thing to even be made over.

That bad faith is a lie to the self implies a split self, a self to whom the self can tell a lie. The very basic idea of thinking of the body as separate from the self is to exemplify a bad faith attitude. Although intersubjectivity is a fundamental element of being-in-the-world, there is no “other” *within* the self. Instead, the self is a unity created in freedom. Yet this unity, as a project, places itself as an ongoing thematic of an identified Other. The self unfolding in a life project, in other words, is what I identify as *me*.

The ability to dissimilate is second nature in contemporary society. We have all mastered the art of affectation. Yet these kinds of behaviors are problematic for Sartre – one is nothing more than who one is on the surface or even who one pretends to be. One cannot be “other” than what one’s actions convey, and one’s actions cannot take place without having done so from somewhere, and that is the body. There is no difference between a costume and reality. If one is one’s body (and one’s clothes are extension of that body), then how one acts – and what one wears – *is* an instance or instances of who or what one is. Yet, the problem of bad faith remains because one is still lying to oneself about freedom.

Socrates warned his guardians in the *Republic* against the dangers of imitation, chiding them to remember that ultimately “the manners maketh the man.” In fact, Socrates suggests that there is no difference in the acting out of some behavior or emotion and the actual possessing of it. If one imitates a person filled with pity and fear, as one comes to embody those emotions, one actually possesses them. For Socrates, to

imitate is to become what one is imitating. Because there is no division between the embodied self and the “inner” self, the way one *behaves* is who one is. This same idea applies to the Sartrean formulation. As we begin to dissimilate and play various roles through the donning of certain costumes – if, as Sartre has told us, one is nothing but one’s socially-constructed self mediated by the choices we make – then one in a sense becomes those people one thinks one is only imitating. Where does the experience of wearing clothes or choosing how to dress fall into the bad faith continuum?

I will first address the relationship of the body to bad faith, as the body is the starting point for a discussion of clothing. Second, I will deal with the fundamental purposes of dress. Last, I will address the spirit of seriousness, the overarching aspect of bad faith that applies to the common approach to clothing in contemporary society.

Bad faith and the body

The reality of embodiment is precisely what allows one to be known in one’s subjectivity (as well as objectivity) by an Other. As we have seen, embodiment affords one a necessary “point of view” on the world. But it is the gaining of a “point of view” that allows one to also be seen as an object – and fall prey to a descent into objectivity or thingliness. As Phyllis Sutton Morris wrote in *Sartre’s Concept of a Person* the lived experience of our own bodies can be described in one of the following three frameworks:

“one in which we fully identify with the body, partially identify with it, or distance ourselves from the body.”³³

It is important to begin with the body, because it is only within the framework of embodiment that clothing has any meaning. And it is in understanding the body that clothing can be seen also as a means of hiding. Let’s initially pose two different scenarios illustrating an individual’s experience of her body. These two extremes will set the stage for what will be seen as a bad faith relationship to the body.

In one instance, an individual may tell herself that she is nothing but her body. Her body is all there is. As a result, she is either resigned and feels helpless, a victim of a body “not of her own choosing” (like women who may resign themselves to perpetual sexual objectification by men) or she invests a great deal of time, energy, and money into changing or molding that body into something she deems more suitable to herself. Yet, this activity of manipulating or modifying the body is not the active “taking ownership” and working out of freedom that it at first may seem. This emphasis on the body, as if it is all there is, is still a lie to the self regarding the state of human freedom (and human sociality). To manipulate the body in such a way is to imply that there is another body, a different body – one that can be created, purchased, or chiseled – which is more suitable to one’s “real” self. So, although on the surface it seems that this individual has accepted embodiment as the natural and foundational state of human existence, she has still told herself the lie that there is a “self” more real, more genuine, and that the body must change in order to match it.

Plastic surgery is an example. Take, for instance, Heidi Montag, a young

³³ Phyllis Sutton Morris, *Sartre’s Concept of a Person: An Analytic Approach*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 152.

Hollywood starlet, who had ten plastic surgical procedures in one day in an attempt to uncover a “better” version of her self.³⁴ In an extended interview she spoke about her feelings and thoughts regarding her surgery, and she noted that she felt like an improved version of herself. She is finally the person she always believed she was.³⁵

On the other hand, an individual may tell herself that her body is an empty shell that conceals or stifles her “real self” (inner self.) This person eschews material elements of the world. Either dramatically adopting the position of a nudist or perhaps wearing tattered or threadbare clothing to reveal her distaste for material objects, this person believes that the body is a prison of the mind, a fleshly mass to be ignored or stifled. Imagine one wearing a uniform that is intended to make the body disappear such as a nun’s habit or clerical robes. All fleshly desires or needs are at once a nuisance, annoyance, and a reminder that the true, unfettered self exists elsewhere – in the mind or the soul. According to Sartre, this person is in bad faith because she considers herself an absolute transcendence on the level of God, which, for him, is a quintessential exemplar of bad faith: a for-itself-in-itself. She shuns the bodily cage to which she has been resigned and prefers instead to consider her self a free-floating mind transcending all points of view. She denies the inevitable facticity and givenness of human experience, and treats the body as a cumbersome hindrance, at best, to the real experience of human existence – the mind. This individual demonstrates this sort of distaste for the body through either living like an ascetic, denying herself bodily pleasures and/or needs

³⁴ Jennifer Garcia, “Heidi Montag: Addicted to Plastic Surgery,” *People Magazine* (January 13, 2010): <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20336472,00.html>.

³⁵ Not to venture too far into a discussion of plastic surgery and body modification, but it is worth noting that most gender-reassignment surgeries are done for this same reason – such people feel they are finally who “they always were.” And yet, the bodily givens of their situation were previously different.

through strict bodily and mental discipline, or through ignoring her body, allowing herself to become a grotesque, unkempt slob. It is possible that a person with this mindset would refrain from practicing even the most basic forms of personal hygiene, because to do so would be to accept some bodily demands on the person. It would be to acquiesce to an embodiment that cannot be avoided.

For Sartre, lying to the self is an essential dimension of bad faith. The self constantly faces itself as possibility, or rather, freedom in possibility. To deny such freedom is to take on an attitude of bad faith. Yet, although free, human beings are not limitlessly so. Our desires could exceed our capacities, and our choices, having been made, cannot simply be erased by our subsequent choices, although their significance could be changed. Striking a balance between the resignation of the self to objective thing-hood or transcendent freedom is to accept the essential state of the human being – freedom within finitude.

It has become commonplace for people in western society to regard themselves in terms of the mind/body division. For Sartre, to even speak of the mind/body duality is to address a false problem: Descartes's dilemma begins from a defective starting place. Discussing the body as either mind or body is to imply that there exists two such distinct substances of an individual. In Sartre's perspective, the two are so enmeshed in the human project of freedom that it is impossible to even see them as two separate substances that require unification. Even more, Sartre rejects the notion of human substance.

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the idea that an individual could be “simply” mind is to imply a completely disembodied

consciousness floating nowhere.³⁶ Consciousness, as we have seen, necessitates primarily a point of view, a “here” from which to know and perceive (and interpret) the world. Along with the idea that consciousness absolutely requires grounding in a “here,” a particular time and place, consciousness is also intended. This intentionality means that consciousness is directed: it is “about,” “of,” or “toward” something. Consciousness is action from a unique place and time – a body.

The body is that which affords a perspective, a point of view, but it is also that which one may have a perspective upon. It is simultaneously that by which one defines oneself and that by which one experiences self-distancing. Consider Sartre’s example of a young woman on a date that was not supposed to be a date. The example demonstrates the way in which one may use the body to fluctuate between an exaggerated sense of objectification on one hand and a heightened sense of subjectivity on the other. The woman in this case either relieves herself of the responsibility of choice and the requirements of decision – through an appeal to her supposed complete transcendence – or refuses to acknowledge the material elements of her companion’s desire for her. She made herself into mere object-flesh, her hand only a thing in his hand.

The suitor holds her hand, but she continues the conversation as if unaware of his gesture. Her hand, in his, is devoid of the agency manifesting consent or rejection. It is suspended in a realm of seeming non-choice; she seems to have evacuated her body. In effect, her suitor holds her hand but not *her*. But this flight of the self is achieved through an act of choice, and that could only have been done through moving inward in a balance of transcendence and facticity. To identify her actions as bad faith requires the rejection

³⁶ See *Phenomenology of Perception* by Merleau-Ponty for more.

of disembodiment, which, as we have seen in Sartre's portraits of sadism and masochism, is a dimension of that phenomenon.

As Sartre's example also illustrates, it is in connection with an "Other" that bad faith is brought to the surface. This is because it is through the Other that one is able to see oneself being seen and make the decision of how to relate to that appearance or interpretation of the self. In the example of the date that was supposedly not a date, this woman, uncertain of how to direct her desire or receive the desire of her companion, suspends choice through an act of bad faith. The premise of the date itself almost inherently acknowledges physical attraction on the part of the young man. The woman knows this even when she accepted the date, even where she may clearly state the non-romantic basis of her decision. The approached woman behaves as if her suitor's amorous advance, grounded in her objectification, was not in the picture. Recall that when the young man holds her hand, she behaves as if she doesn't even notice, allowing her hand to lie there limp, offering no response. She has found herself at one with transcendence, not at all in touch with her body. And yet, if the young man were not to have made his move, not to make his advance, would she been disappointed? Did she not want to be desired? Sartre reveals, in this example, the complex interplay of disharmony between transcendence and facticity at work in bad faith.

Dress: Fashion, Clothing, and Style

A clarification needs to be made concerning the differences between the concepts "fashion," "clothing," and "style." These terms are often used interchangeably in

discussions regarding dress and yet they represent three quite distinct schemata for thinking of human relationships to garments. In what follows, I will lay out a conceptual framework for analyzing these related yet distinct terms, as a first step toward untangling the knot of how dress can be understood.

It seems that garments may serve three unique roles in society, each of which stems from a unique conception of human nature combined with a particular understanding of the human relationship to material objects. These three roles are expressed when we use the different terms “fashion,” “clothing,” or “style.” The three distinct functions that correlate with these concepts are:

1. Dress as armor (or *fashion*)
2. Dress as relationship (or *clothing*)
3. Dress as play (or *style*)

Many individuals may fluctuate in their conceptual frameworks on this matter and may see dress as a combination of these three notions, but they each entail a distinct set of implications for a human attitude toward covering the body.

Under the “dress as armor” rubric, a garment is understood as something that enhances or distorts the body while always transforming it. This is the conception of clothing that fits most clearly into the “bad faith” analysis I will outline in the pages that follow. As armor, clothing in this sense conceals our vulnerability through a presentation of a stronger self. Today, however, what is also worn, through, e.g., technological enhancement, is our corporeality beneath our armor of clothing. In effect, the body is

transformed from that which is dressed to that which also is a form of dress. The result: The more the boundaries between body and garment become blurred, the better. The image of cyborg bodies, e.g. – and the complementary move toward the post-human – represents the picture of the body as “armored” by clothing (or, more precisely, technologically advanced clothing).

In addition to the ways that dress as armor fits into the current technological paradigm, it seems that this mentality is the precise perspective characteristic of the fashion industry proper. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the fashion industry promotes a theory of embodiment in which the body is to be conformed to fit an arbitrary standard of beauty. This standard is communicated through a variety of means including magazines, fashion shows, advertisements, as well as the sizing and availability of garments themselves. All of the avenues serve to perpetuate the notion that the body is something to be shaped, carved, made into an ideal more expressive of one’s inner – supposedly “fashionable” – self. If the body is so malleable, then it follows that fashion garments should serve this ultimate purpose as well. Garments “in fashion” should *transform* the self – from one who is on the outside of fashion to one who is “in.”

In both the technological and fashion industry manifestations, to think of “dress as armor” is to understand the boundary between the body and the clothing that covers it as permeable, constantly shifting and nearly impossible to define. There is no such thing as a “natural” body under this perspective – for nakedness disappears where one could only be “nude,” which is to say, to wear the body as a garment. Under this paradigm, clothing, including the body as clothing, becomes a living mask.

Armor is the distinguishing metaphor here for several reasons. Initially, armor itself creates a tough outer shell – an actual covering of the body that mimics the shape of the body but that somehow reshapes it, makes it stronger.³⁷ Second, armor is equipment, an accessory to the body – a notion I think gets at the heart of the idea that the body under this perspective is in itself incomplete and is in need of additional accessorizing in order to be fully or adequately socialized. The word garment itself comes from the Old French word “*garnir*” – to equip. This idea of “equipping” the self demonstrates how we understand clothing to function and yet this attitude promotes a bad faith approach to clothing and the body. The notion of armor as equipment serves as a comment toward the “game of fashion” that pervades the fashion industry. As I will mention in chapter three, a bad faith attitude occurs when one takes on the spirit of seriousness and accepts the “game” as pre-given. For all the reasons stated above, it seems plausible to equate the perspective of “dress as armor” with the concept of *fashion*.

Under the rubric in which dress is primarily about relationship one discovers many solutions to the bad faith mentality. This perspective takes for granted human inter-subjectivity and allows that clothing is essentially used to navigate through a world of others. The focus is shifted off the ways in which clothing forms or distorts the body; rather the interest is on the simple ways in which clothing allows one to cultivate

³⁷ If fashion is armor, as we move more and more toward a post-human perspective on hybrid techno-biological beings, the issue of plastic surgery has become increasingly relevant. In fact fashion and plastic surgery go hand in hand as almost every major fashion magazine consistently runs articles related to plastic surgery. Plastic surgery and fashion are so closely connected because their perspective on embodiment based on certain similar Cartesian presuppositions. See Victoria Pitts-Taylor’s *Surgery Junkies* for a poignant and striking analysis of plastic surgery in contemporary life.

relationships with others – even in the accepted fact that to be naked is to be excluded from civilized society.³⁸

As I will outline in the last chapter of this dissertation, if clothing is to have any communicative power, it is only within specific contexts. Language is contextually dependent and so is the language of clothing. I see these contexts as group-dependent. Here is where the ideas of social roles and manners enter the picture. For many, dictates concerning clothing are simply about “what to wear when and where” and how to preserve distinct social contexts. Uniforms are a part of this picture, most vividly demonstrating the propriety of certain forms of dress over others for specific tasks and jobs.

A significant part of the relational dynamic that I will outline in chapter five of this study is the fact that human interactions depend on a distinction between public and private. As I trace the importance of love and intimacy for overcoming bad faith, one may come to see how adopting certain social roles and performing rituals of “politeness” do not destroy the possibility of actual relationships but actually provide a necessary background against which they may occur.

Paralleling my ideas concerning the veil as a frame to understand clothing, if garments serve as a means of mediating relationships, then they also serve to maintain boundaries between the public/private and the sacred/profane. Much in the same way that clothes “frame” the body or present boundaries of the body, they serve to “frame” certain

³⁸ On a recent beautiful day in a park in Brooklyn, the sirens of a fire truck, ambulance and police car interrupted picnickers. When turning in the direction of the commotion I saw the culprit – a woman completely naked walking through the middle of the park. Yet another example of the necessity of clothing in contemporary society.

social contexts. It seems this way of thinking of dress most closely describes *clothes*, as distinct from fashion or style.

The third perspective that defines an attitude toward dress is one in which clothing serves as a playful object of fun or whimsy. This is the perspective in which one may wear outlandish clothes “just for the fun of it” or simply because one enjoys the play of colors and textures. In this mode of thinking clothing is not intended to communicate anything specific to another or to alter or transform the body – it simply reflects an aesthetic sensibility. In this way, clothing can be thought of as aesthetically expressive, but not necessarily expressive of a self or a certain message. Clothing serves as a springboard for the imagination, and the body becomes a canvas.

This attitude toward clothing is what I would associate with *style* – for style indicates something about an individual, as distinct from a group or particular context. Style seems to be more all-pervasive and less fluid between differing contexts and social groups. Style is an attitude toward clothing in which a person’s agency is explicit in how she wears clothes and maintains control over the medium of garments. The garments do not dominate her or make her more like everyone else, as in the case of dress as armor.

This view also most closely characterizes the move to regard fashion as art. While there are already several notable museums devoted to showcasing clothing as art – most notably the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum, and the Musée de la Mode in Paris – many other world-class museums have taken an interest in mounting exhibitions of fashion garments.

The expressivity of clothing

In order to address the precise ways in which fashion may be understood as a manifestation of bad faith, it is important to delineate the functions that fashion accomplishes for the individual in society. To what degree is fashion simply about social acceptability? Is dressing the self more about emulation or self-expression?

Sociologist Georg Simmel offers an excellent summary of the purpose of garments in society. In his seminal essay simply entitled “Fashion,” Simmel describes our desire to dress in certain ways by offering a concise picture of our most basic psychological and sociological needs. Initially, he acknowledges that there are “two antagonistic forces” always at work in the human psyche – the desire to realize one’s full potential as an individual and the desire to belong to a group. These conflicting powers are best described as a longing for socialization on the one hand and a desire for individualization on the other. For Simmel, socialization “represents the idea of generalization, of uniformity, of inactive similarity of the forms and contents of life,” while individualization “stands for motion, for differentiation of separate elements, producing the restless changing of an individual life.”³⁹ These dualities represent: inner freedom versus enslavement; freedom versus dependence; individual demarcation versus equalizing unification. Ultimately, Simmel sees these conflicting desires as marking social life as a kind of battlefield, as one constantly shifts back and forth between these two extremes.

But despite the picture of the “social battleground” that Simmel has painted, one is offered one consolation: the realm of fashion is one place where these two distinct and

³⁹ Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *International Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1904): 130.

opposing desires might meet. Simmel says that fashion specifically reconciles these two desires because it allows for uniformity *within* a group and differentiation *between* groups: “Two social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion, namely, the need of union on the one hand, and the need of isolation on the other.”⁴⁰ Without the need for union no “fashion” can arise. Fashion itself implies a longed-for acceptance by another, or a recognition that one is in fact “in” fashion. But it simultaneously depends on the need for distinction – specifically distinction between groups. Simmel writes, “It is peculiarly characteristic of fashion that it renders possible a social obedience, which at the same time is a form of individual differentiation.”⁴¹

Simmel explains that the tendency toward imitation is a main component of the desire to be social, or to be included in a group. Yet this social inclusion comes with a price: “the individual is freed from the worry of choosing and appears as simply a creature of the group, as a vessel of the social contents.”⁴² These words sound extremely similar to Sartre’s on bad faith. To lose oneself in a group through the abdication of choice, whether from a heightened sense of objectivity or subjectivity, is precisely to act in bad faith. For Simmel and for Sartre, one who is bound to a group in this way has not faced one’s own responsibility to choose, thus denying a basic aspect of human existence.

There is a point at which the expression of the self through dress becomes more about others. And there is a point at which the others one cares to impress begin to lure a person into their social game of surrendered choice. It is this social game element of dress and fashion that reveals the ways in which a person can begin to take fashion too

⁴⁰ Ibid, 137.

⁴¹ Ibid, 141.

⁴² Ibid, 132.

seriously, in a way that manifests bad faith. As one relinquishes one's "freedom to choose," one slides into a bad faith relationship with fashion.

The Materialization of Value and the Game of Fashion

While the desire to form groups through dress is a strong impetus for dressing in a certain fashion, many find themselves swallowed up by the pressure to conform to whatever group they have chosen. Although the individual first chooses which group with which she would associate, ultimately she begins to see the values of the group as existing outside of herself and even the group itself, as, in other words, a material reality. Recall that a materialization of values, or a spirit of seriousness, in which one relinquishes control and freedom, is a basic mechanism of the bad faith attitude.

Human beings face not only the values they forge but also their valuing those values. This meta-valuing brings to the fore the responsibility for values, which, as we have seen, is a source also of anguish. One constantly bestows value on things one encounters in the world: objects, experiences, and even other people. And as a free individual (at least those in a free society), one has the agency to choose which "others" one deems valuable. One has the power to decide which groups one is concerned with and whose opinion ultimately matters. A person decides which groups to "believe" in. Yet one who subscribes to a "fashion game," dictated by a specific group of others, forgets (or hides) her power to choose. She has convinced herself of the materialization of value.

This serious game concept is a significant one. A non-serious game is a form of

play in which responsibility for the game is conceded. The individual recognizes the relationship of play, which means the rules are not fixed in stone, and their transformation depend on the individual's decision. Within the idea of a serious game, however, many of the components of bad faith are at work. There is already the contradictory aspect of seriousness and play being brought together. Such a game forgets itself as play, as, in effect, a game. It is fixed, closed. A serious game is a social interaction in which all the rules and behaviors have specific meaning as dictated by the group who has in turn renounced responsibility for such rules by claiming their objective value or material reality. It is therefore by definition a created environment with assigned meaning and rules claiming to be otherwise. And yet, since a game is something that can be freely entered into, one always holds the power of exiting the game and no longer "playing." Seriousness, as we have seen, conceals this option.

When one begins to think of values as materially determined, existing apart from the self, the group already in existence becomes the measure to which one must shape oneself into which to fit. The group becomes a sort of Procrustean bed to which one must force oneself to fit in. As Sartre sees it, in seriousness one chooses to play the game while denying it is a game. We then let the game play us.

Fashion is frequently described as a game – the game of fashion. "One day you're in, the next day, you're out," Heidi Klum tells the contestants of "reality" television show *Project Runway*. Even outside of the fashion industry, most people acknowledge that to put on clothing is in some way to play a role, or to wear a costume and engage in a game of social acceptance. However, it is important to remember that one chooses to play games in full awareness of the existence of the game. When one decides to play a certain

game, one allows oneself to be subject to the rules of the game in order to play appropriately.

In the same way in fashion, one allows oneself to be subject to certain restrictions, imposed by the group one wishes to join, in order to play the game effectively. To engage in such an activity without practicing bad faith would be to determine the value of the game itself – what it means to you – rather than becoming merely a “player” swept away by rules of fashion that are somehow predetermined. Although one might play any average everyday game for mere entertainment or to exercise the imagination, as Georg Simmel has reminded us, games with fashion and clothing are played to satisfy a much more fundamental desire – the desire to fit in and be recognized by others.

The self-imposed restriction of “playing the game” should always leave the power in one’s own hands. But human beings are malleable creatures. Unfortunately, if one remains in the game long enough one might lose the ability to think self-reflectively and critically. The game begins to play the player, who no longer participates as a free agent who has chosen a group to join but is instead controlled by the dictates of that group. The relationship to clothing becomes like Doctor Frankenstein, who built an uncontrollable projection of himself. Consider for instance the 1998 cult-classic film *Mean Girls*: at one point after the protagonist Cady had been sent to “spy” on the hated Plastics, she begins to enjoy her new social status as a “popular girl” so much that her real friends begin to criticize her by saying, “You aren't just spying anymore Cady, you've become one of them.” Part of the unique fact of embodiment is that human beings learn behavior as much from the outside in as from the inside out. So, “going through the motions,” as it were, can sometimes equal the actual performance of a certain action. People are judged

on their appearance and their embodiment because one knows that once one begins to “wear” the insignia of a certain group, whether or not one initially adhere to all the rules, eventually the Red Shoes force us to dance.

The spirit of seriousness

Simone de Beauvoir’s explanation of the spirit of seriousness is the transition from the “game of fashion” back to bad faith. The “serious man” of whom she writes in the *Ethics of Ambiguity* is one who has accepted the materialization of value, indicating a bad faith attitude. If the serious person believes in the materialization of value, she takes the physical world to be normative, governed by rules she cannot control. As this attitude is applied to different social endeavors in the actual world, the theme of a serious game begins to develop. What the person in bad faith fails to realize is that she is the one who has determined to respect the values that she believes outside of herself. This is where the problem of mistaken belief arises – she puts her belief in situations she actually *does* control. This is the faith aspect of bad faith.

The serious person is an individual who has denied basic human freedom and accepted that circumstances and values have been placed upon her, perhaps even against her wishes. She is a victim, and as such, she must take the world seriously. This materialization of value is described as such:

The child's situation is finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and trees. This means that the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the

spirit of seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things.⁴³

Simone de Beauvoir explains that an ethic following Sartre's ideas of freedom of consciousness must be an ethic of ambiguity, because to accept essential freedom is to reject the notion of closed meanings. Values are an expression of our bringing meaning to reality. And yet, an opposing ethic "has been a matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being engulfed in it, by yielding to eternity or enclosing oneself in the pure moment."⁴⁴ De Beauvoir perfectly describes the condition of bad faith – human experience as pure inwardness or as pure externality, subjectivity or objectivity.

Beauvoir expands upon Sartre's notion of bad faith by reiterating the desire for "flight from the self." The serious man, as an example of the person living in bad faith, wants to flee himself or forget himself. She writes, "His acts are never positive choices, only flights. He can not prevent himself from being a presence in the world, but maintains this presence on the plane of bare facticity." He loses himself because he wants to vanish. She even specifically writes that the serious man seeks to "take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world ... he will take refuge behind a label."⁴⁵ The serious man longs to be one of a group, a stereotype, a generalization of a category.

Fashion and the groups formed through fashion are particularly well-suited environments for this sort of bad faith. The person in bad faith will choose anything in which she can lie to herself: "The thing that matters to the serious man is not so much the nature of the object which he prefers to himself, but rather the fact of being able to lose

⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 2000), 35.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 44.

himself in it. So much so, that the movement toward the object is, in fact, through his arbitrary act the most radical assertion of subjectivity.”⁴⁶ The object, in this case, is fashion.

Ultimately, since the attitude of bad faith is built on a lie, the greatest fear for the serious man is that of exposure. “His very successes have a taste of ashes, for the serious is one of those ways of trying to realize the impossible synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself. The serious man wills himself to be a god; but he is not one and he knows it. He wishes to rid himself of his subjectivity, but it constantly risks being unmasked; it is unmasked.”⁴⁷ This is not insignificant in relation to dress. This theme of deceit and masquerade is unavoidable. Even in one’s most accomplished moments of deceit, of wearing a specific costume in fashion, one fears being unmasked.

While the spirit of seriousness and the attitude of bad faith are about a person lying to the self about the nature of the self, there are implications for the relationship between the self and other as well. Eradicating the harmony between mind and body is to simultaneously destroy the fundamental relationship of the self and other. They are inevitably connected. Simone de Beauvoir writes, “I concern others and they concern me. There we have an indissoluble truth. The me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship.”⁴⁸ And as Sartre says: “the original bond with the Other first arises in connection with the relation between my body and the Other’s body.”⁴⁹ There are distinct ramifications for these sorts of bad faith perspectives and one’s interactions

⁴⁶ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁹ Sartre, 471.

with others. Bad faith is not only a severing of the self from itself, but it is also a severing of relationships between the self and others.

Masochism and Sadism

Bad faith is a lie to the self that manifests itself in an effort to avoid relations to others with the consequence of constructing unusual relations with others. For Sartre, there are two extremes of bad faith which directly affect others: masochism and sadism. Encountering the Other can fill us with fear – fear of compromising our own freedom or subjectivity. As Ronald Grimsley has written in his essay entitled “An Aspect of Sartre and the Unconscious”: “Personal relationships will be characterized by a conflict which emerges as a perpetual oscillation between freedom and objectivity, between transfiguration (when I affirm my freedom by looking at the other) and degradation (when I myself am subjugated by the other's look).”⁵⁰ Here he has described the swinging between sadism and masochism.

Recall that the masochist is one who desires to be, which, for the masochist, means being seen or being the object of attention. The masochist identifies with her thingly nature and her desire is to be pure object. This is the sort of person who might be obsessed with clothing, thinking that what others see of her is all she is. Her motto is: “I am my flesh. Everyone else sees me.” Or: “I am only what others see.”

In contrast, the sadist desires to be pure transcendence through denying others the ability to see. She seeks to possess the only point of view. She desires invisibility in a

⁵⁰ Ronald Grimsley, “An Aspect of Sartre and the Unconscious,” *Philosophy* 30, no. 112 (1955): 34.

sense, to be free of the binding circumstances of the body. Her motto is: “I am my subjectivity. I am the only one with an inner life. Everyone else is mere body.” The sadist’s relationship to clothing could be manifested both through dressing to extremes or not caring at all. Either an obsession with clothes (in order to manifest herself as the only point of view) and an eschewing of clothes as too bodily, not referring to subjectivity, point to this sort of bad faith relationship to clothing.

Conclusion: Fashion as Confession

We pause before the closet regarding the fabric and the garments that hang within. Some worn thin; others are new, crisp, and fresh. But all of them are a second skin, waiting to be worn, to conceal some aspect of the body within the folds of fabric. In every case, clothing is worn as an outer shell to conceal, to protect, or to disguise the self within. Indeed, clothes are often thought to express the self, but fundamental to the action of dressing is a concealment of the body. It is a disguise.

How is clothing (in bad faith) uniquely a disguise? What is implied in the concept of a disguise? How can the body be lived or even “worn” as a disguise? The only way to think of the body as a disguise is to adopt a posture of bad faith.⁵¹ In this attitude, one thinks of the body in much the same way as the clothing hanging in the closet – as a garment to cover. But to cover what? The self? Some inner soul? Mind? What could the

⁵¹ I will discuss this idea at length in chapter five, where I will clarify why a disguise may not always be in bad faith. For now, it should be sufficient to say that bad faith is always a disguise, but a disguise is not always bad faith.

body, the most fundamental substance of the self, possibly hide from itself? What enables the self to hide from itself? What enables the self to tell a lie to itself? Most basically, what enables this sort of an attitude is a sort of divided thinking in which the self becomes “other” to itself. The self enters a sort of dialogue with itself concerning what or who the self is. However, as Sartre would understand it, the self may only be what it is, in situations chosen in freedom, in responsibility. Bad faith is a disguise because it hides the real nature of the self from itself.

Clothing is not an expression as is commonly accepted, but it is rather a *confession* of one’s intersubjectivity. Yet, one disguises oneself as a self-sufficient being who wants attention from others, but who doesn’t need those others. But there is a plea at work. Through bad faith, one sets up the disguise, the lie, but the confession still comes through.

Clothing plays a primary role in society through this mechanism of confession. As confession, fashion allows one to reveal what was once hidden. While dress has always been a play between concealing and revealing, the notion of confession highlights the manner in which dress allows one to reveal a significant trait or aspect of one’s individuality, specifically in reference to a certain group of others. Confessions are frequently understood as a way in which one makes a plea for inclusion: “I confess such and such, therefore I am one of you.” A collective confession is a way that a specific group defines what is common to all its members. As such, dress is a form of visual confession, a subtle calling card which screams, “This is what I believe to be true about my self and others.”

If fashion is to express anything, it is not strictly individualized, but rather this kind of collective confession. To speak of the confession of fashion is not simply to reference the obvious ways in which we may signal something to another. I am also referring to a deep, at times subconscious, level of admission, the secret acknowledgement that even the very act of putting on a garment entails. At this level, fashion or dress speaks to the very core of who a person is as a social self, a constantly interacting creature of community. The process of navigating through a world of others is not one characterized by clear-cut communication and behavioral signals. The methods through which one engages and interacts with others is fraught with confusion, blurred boundaries and missed references. Within this cluster of confused messages, clothing stands out as one of the material objects one is forced to include as a first layer social skin in social interactions. It is not novel to say that objects mediate and often complicate our interactions with others, but I think it is new to add that clothing itself whispers of a tightly held secret of yearning – a desire for closeness, for relationship, for unity.

“This above all: To thine own self be true.” Shakespeare's famous words not only remind one to stay true to oneself in the midst of persuasive pressure from others but also to tell oneself the truth. Self-deceit is in some senses the gravest existential state. Sartre indeed thought so, as his work on bad faith shaped almost his entire philosophical theory. Essentially, bad faith posits the self as “a project of disguise,” a deceit, mask, or masquerade. For many, this is what clothing essentially is. But in fact, embodiment, and by extension, clothing is an essential part of who one fundamentally is. There is no disguise.

If one plays at being oneself one is merely a representation of that self rather than that self in reality. This is the current relationship to dress – everyone is playing at being something in the way they dress – uniforms, costumes, roles, accessories – and yet, despite the casual undertone of such a relationship to clothing, it is a deep form of bad faith. Because in being a kind of person in representation only, one becomes replaceable. One is not even that kind of person sincerely, so how could one ever be unique in that role? In dressing in the mode of “being what I am not,” one becomes essentially a “divine absence.” “On all sides I escape being, and yet, I am.”

In disguise, one plays a serious game of fashion. Within the serious game, one hides one’s freedom from oneself while interacting with others as replaceable. Clothing enables one to engage in a two-fold disguise – hiding one’s freedom from oneself and hiding one’s intersubjectivity from others.

In addition, if one thinks of the body as separate from the self then the idea of makeover has new meaning, or rather gives the self new meaning. Then one can understand fashion as a means of making the outer covering – the body and clothing – into something more like the “self” underneath. Or the “self” that desires to fit into certain groups. Here is the confession element. But against the understanding of bad faith which Sartre develops, one can see this view of the self and the body (and clothing) can be seen as inherently flawed and denying certain aspects of the self that are necessary for innate human freedom to flourish.

The remainder of this dissertation will be a further examination of these manifestations of bad faith as well as a discussion of possible remedies for this severed view of the self and its outer covering.

**CHAPTER THREE:
BAD FAITH MASOCHISM: SEDUCTION, MIRRORING, AND EXPOSURE**

“The serious is not defined by the nature of the ends pursued. A frivolous lady of fashion can have this mentality of the serious as well as an engineer.”
Simone de Beauvoir

As the physical union of subject and object, the body simultaneously maintains distance between two people and facilitates intimacy. In French, the expression *corps-à-corps* (body-to-body) identifies this relationship. Our bodies are our point of view from which to identify other bodies; and touch, embrace, and sexual intimacy are functions of embodiment. Likewise, clothing helps one maintain status as a distinct individual while allowing for connection with others and joining groups. Clothing is a material mediator between the self and the physical world, and as such it is a significant means through which human beings form relationships with others.

And yet, as a social game with a tendency, when serious, to promote bad faith, fashion can infect those relationships with a specific kind of deceit. This deceit, in which the self lies to itself (and others) concerning ultimate freedom, is, according to Sartre, played out in behaviors characterized by masochism or sadism. Through either immersing oneself in relationships as a thing (masochism) or maintaining a distance from all others through attempting to make them into things (sadism), the person in a bad faith posture toward clothing prohibits herself from being known, acknowledged, and recognized in the very ways she desires: she could imagine herself as hidden while

gazing upon others, or she could regard herself as so exposed that she is only there for others.

Although Sartre's main concern is not moral appraisal – bad or good – he does acknowledge that bad faith denies the basic condition of human existence. For my argument, I will say that to be in a bad faith relationship to clothing is to have something to confess. In fact, the element of deceit or disguise mentioned in the previous chapter does imply a form of duplicity that could demand a confession. This sort of action is manifested, I have been arguing, in at least two distinct ways from a Sartrean perspective: sadism and masochism.

I will offer an analysis of the mechanism of masochism as it relates to clothing. The masochist in bad faith attempts either to seduce or mirror the other in order to draw her into a problematic relationship. I will show how these two behaviors of the masochist – seduction and imitation – are at the very heart of the compelling nature of clothing. Various modes of dress only give us more tools in the toolbox to promote deceit before the self, as Sartre puts it, concerning human beings' freedom.

To set the stage for a deeper look at masochism, let's first look at the ways that fashion mediates group membership. As mentioned in chapter two, fashion is most basically about a desire to form relationships, signaling to others that one would like to be a member of their group. But if it is ultimately about group formation, as Georg Simmel wrote, then fashion is inextricably involved with others. (One could even say that dress is intentionally "about" others as much as it is about the self.)

Individuals are not islands. A world of others is unavoidable. But it's not just that one is "always already with others" in the Heideggerian sense. One also yearns, as Lynn

Chancer contends in *The Sadomasochism of Everyday Life*, for a response from those others at a most basic level, “in order for life to thrive... human beings must feel acknowledged or recognized by others: if not recognized, they cannot possibly acknowledge and recognize themselves. How can 'I' have any sense of identity unless there is someone who is 'not I' by comparison?”⁵² Because of this dependency on and intersubjective relation with others, one is in a position where those relationships could be abused.

By its very nature, fashion is a social enterprise. As the liminal point of contact between an individual’s transcendent subjectivity and embodied objectivity, fashion is an interface, a peculiar union between a person’s experiences of her own self and her self-for-others. Fashion is a unique social game that highlights these dualities within human beings. As such, it lends itself to a special kind of bad faith which was discussed in the previous chapter.

It is possible to use dress as a means of denying a basic aspect of humanity as one fluctuates between an extreme form of narcissistic distancing from others or over-identification with others, both of which fit within Sartre’s ideas of sadism and masochism. But how so? Surely one indicates certain things to specific others, and much has been written on the language of clothing, but at what point does a person stop dressing with others in mind and “being-for-others”?⁵³ At what point do the necessary demands of intersubjectivity become a relation to others characterized by bad faith?

⁵² Lynn Chancer, *The Sadomasochism of Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness*. (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 70.

⁵³ See Alison Lurie’s *The Language of Clothing* for more on how clothing is used to communicate.

Revisiting Masochism

The brand of bad faith that emerges in relation to others is a multi-layered lie to the self and a lie to others, built upon fear and fleeing from responsibility and freedom. Bad faith masochism in particular appears, as we have seen, as an individual discards her subjectivity in favor of becoming an object under the gaze of the other. Through being recognized as a pure object by an Other, or rather particular Others, the individual attempts to be justified in her existence. And yet the supposedly justified existence is false.

Masochism is a particular kind of social outworking of bad faith in which the natural urge to be acknowledged and recognized by the other is distorted. “No one can really extricate himself or herself from the dependency on others, from the need for recognition,” writes Jessica Benjamin in *Powers of Desire*. “[Sado]masochism is fueled and motivated by a restless desire to somehow, in some way, procure recognition from another.”⁵⁴ Grimsley adds: “[The] aim in masochism is to get myself absorbed into the other's existence and thereby effect such a complete assimilation of myself to the other that I can shed the intolerable burden of my own freedom.”⁵⁵ Paradoxically, “the masochist's apparent concern with the other's freedom really disguises an attempt to establish a certain relationship with himself.”⁵⁶ Even in the masochistic, bad faith attitude, “I cannot escape from the fact that I am an active personality playing a definite

⁵⁴ Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, Sharon Thompson eds, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 283.

⁵⁵ Grimsley, 35.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

role and choosing to be a particular type of person.”⁵⁷ Ultimately, one is using the other and their freedom as an instrument. The other is an instrument in one’s own self-construction.⁵⁸

Although masochism is most frequently discussed in relation to sexual relations, the masochism Sartre writes of in *Being and Nothingness* extends to a variety of social encounters. Lynn Chancer describes it well: “that which affects the body has its own specific features; the world of sexuality and the erotic melds that which is physically craved to that which is culturally channeled, conjoining the sophisticated to the primordial.”⁵⁹ By way of further explanation, while sadomasochism is most easily examined in the case of sex, she says that “sex is not sought for its own sake.... [B]oth sadist and masochist are searching for some kind of recognition and acknowledgement that goes beyond, and likely originated outside, the realm of the erotic – even as it somehow became married to it.”⁶⁰

Seduction

But then what is at work when the recognition is about seducing the Other, drawing her in? The seduction here is ultimately an issue of belief. One wants to convince the Other that one is who one pretends to be – in the hope the Other will be drawn to them. In seducing another, perhaps one is trying to see whether the Other will believe in the

⁵⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁵⁸ There’s much more to say on this issue of the instrumental view of others – and the self. Many might say that such a perspective is quite akin to the contemporary consumer mentality where even the most intimate relationships are thought of in terms of consumption. For a further discussion, see Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*.

⁵⁹ Chancer, 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 46.

seducer in a way that could help her believe pleasing falsehood over displeasing truths. (This is important because ultimately bad faith is a form of false belief.) The argument is sold through the presentation of the self, but it is an argument built on a lie. How does one forge a relationship based on that kind of belief? In what follows, I address how bad faith manifests itself as the self attempts to draw others toward itself, specifically focusing on how a lie to the self or a self-disguise manifests itself in interactions with the Other.

How does one seek to join groups either through seduction or imitation (or a combination of the two). The bad faith attitude toward the Other, especially with reference to seeking recognition or acknowledgement from the other, becomes a desire either to seduce the other through highlighting difference or to mirror the Other by highlighting similarity. While these behaviors reflect a bad faith disposition both in its masochistic and sadistic expressions, this chapter will only deal with these mechanisms in relation to the masochistic tendency.

Another reason seduction is so pertinent to this discussion is that seduction is primarily feminine and is typically dismissed as an endeavor fraught with deception. It's often accepted that a "seducer" is one who is dubious, slippery, dishonest, and presenting a false version of the self. In fact, the power to seduce is viewed (notably by Baudrillard) as a particular strength of women.⁶¹ As seductive, women take on a role that is both imaginary and symbolic (for men); clothing highlights both of these procedures. Yet within this picture, "the strategy of seduction is one of deception," writes Baudrillard, which reveals its basic connection to a bad faith attitude.⁶²

⁶¹ Sartre famously associates the feminine with sliminess in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 775 and 782.

⁶² Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 69.

Seduction is a ritual of behavior in which one presents oneself to the Other as an idealized Other, or an objectified Other. This self-presentation is enacted with the purpose of provoking desire for the Self in the Other, displayed through mutual interest and mutual anticipation of some kind of culmination or expression of said attraction and desire. However, the interest is typically limited to a purely objective interest in the Other as a physical (and hence, objectified) being. In addition, there is often an anticipation of novelty also at stake. Both parties become for each other a hyper-idealized version of the quintessential “Other” – precisely what is “not me,” but what desires me. An Other reveals to a person who one is through the awareness of who one is not.

Seduction, because of its frequent connection to sex and the body, is often an explicitly objectifying endeavor. It is essentially about the body, thereby highlighting objectivity. Seduction involves expressive body language, which is also primarily about looking, both through concealment and revelation. There is revelation of the self with the promise of total revelation, but it is still a revelation of what is foreign and other, a revelation of the unknown “other,” but specifically an idealized other.

In the case of masochism, seduction is part of the desire to be seen as an object, but as an object of desire. It is therefore a desire to be desired. In some cases to be desired is only to be seen as an object. Yet as desire reaching to affect the desire of an Other, the seeming passiveness of masochism becomes an act of possession through offering the self to be possessed. The masochist takes through being taken, and thus, as we have seen, slides into sadism as the Other is transfixed in desire. It's no coincidence that one of Sartre's primary examples of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness* involves an instance of attempting to resist a romantic situation on a date and another example is Sartre's

discussion of sweetness.⁶³

Along with this kind of objectification comes the process of turning oneself into an illusion. If one has forsaken (or denied) one's freedom, as the masochistic personality strives to accomplish, then whatever self one projects is after all an illusion, or a deception. Baudrillard's observation that "to seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion" harkens to the Sartrean notion that if life is freedom and one has denied basic human freedom, then, in a sense, one is a non-reality, only existing as a constructed illusion.⁶⁴ As an illusion, the individual is harboring existential secrets regarding herself from herself as well as from the Other.

Seduction, in the sexual sense, is usually a highly orchestrated ritual in which both parties are complicit.⁶⁵ They don certain roles in order to proceed to the consummation of the seduction. Two individuals engaged in a dance of seduction become objectified representatives of any two people seeking a situation premised on desire and desired desire. This is why seduction of this kind holds such an allure for those inclined toward masochism, which involves the desire for a justified existence through relationship to an Other. In being desired, these individuals become objects. There is a sense in which there is a ceremonial element to seduction. Seduction implies a ritual order, according to Baudrillard.⁶⁶ The role of clothing as a tool of such rituals is

⁶³ See *BN*, p. 777.

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, 69.

⁶⁵ There is, however, a line of thought that regards notions of mutual complicity forms of blaming victims, where seduction and rape are viewed as one. For a critical discussion, see Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (Boston, MA: Backbay Books, 1993).

⁶⁶ As dependent on a ritual, there is always the fear of slipping up, of not following the correct formula. There are many levels in which one may foil the seductive game. Seduction involves shame: sex, overdressing, nakedness, not fitting (the other – in a physical sense, in the case of intercourse).

unmistakable.⁶⁷ One dresses for seduction.

Masochism and Clothing

But how does this masochism through seduction demonstrate itself in clothing? Two major themes emerge in the concrete case – masochism is demonstrated either through a calculated attempt to reveal and conceal through dress (playing on the object nature of the body) or through an appeal to all things foreign and unfamiliar. Since seduction, especially seduction as a manifestation of masochism, is about objectification and over-identification with the objective nature of the self, clothing which highlights the body as body or the fleshliness of the body is significant. Likewise, as one presents the self as an idealized other in seduction, one is highlighting difference, playing upon the foreign, the strange, and the unfamiliar, so clothing that pronounces difference is indicative of a masochistic attitude.

A person dressing with an over-emphasis on the body qua body may be revealing a masochistic inclination because of how it stimulates the gaze (and even the imagination) of others on one's flesh. Various styles emphasizing the body include anything that highlights specific body parts – the bust, the back, the legs – any article of clothing which intentionally reveals or conceals various body parts in an effort to highlight the body as something to be viewed as an object. (What is even more startling about clothing that highlights specific body parts is that it in a sense dissects the body into an amalgam of various parts – each of which is objectified.) Examples of these kinds of clothing would include bustiers or corsets, backless or strapless dresses and mini-

⁶⁷ Rituals frequently demand props and masks to accomplish specific goals. Clothing serves as one of these props.

skirts, as well as mid-drift baring tank tops and the low-slung pants of today. In addition, any kind of body conscious, particularly body-fitting, clothes made from materials like lycra and spandex would certainly qualify as those that accentuate the body as object and therefore reveal a hint of the masochistic, bad faith attitude.

In the same way, someone with a masochistic tendency may dress in a style that references foreign cultural and ethnic regions. Outlandish and unique items may be worn to play up the desired “strangeness” or “thingliness” one seeks to convey.⁶⁸ Ethnic details and unusual idiosyncratic forms of dress may demonstrate one’s desire to be seen strictly as object. Overt tattoos, extreme hairstyles and hair colors are not indicators of the profound “self-expression” that is typically used to describe this style of dress in common parlance, but rather such modes of dress indicate a masochistic desire to be seen as pure object. Additionally, anyone who wears costume-like clothing, whether it be strictly vintage wear or completely handmade, is seeking uniqueness and individuality more for the sake of being seen as an object than being seen as an individual. Lost in the “over-dressing” that such clothing demonstrates is the subjective nature of the self. So to dress in such a way that one intends to attract attention is perhaps to admit to some sort of deep-rooted masochism.

A contemporary example of an individual who dresses this way is burlesque performer Dita von Teese, who is never “out of costume.” She is always seen in highly detailed and precisely calculated vintage clothing.⁶⁹ Lady Gaga, the celebrity/singer who

⁶⁸ This may be the case because something foreign is often viewed initially simply as an object, an unidentified “thing.”

⁶⁹ See her website: <http://www.dita.net/> and her book *Burlesques and the Art of the Teese/etish and the Art of the Teese* (New York: It Books/HarperCollins, 2006).

has gained notoriety for her extravagant or sometimes non-existent clothing is another example.⁷⁰

A subtler example is the case of the contemporary “hipster.”⁷¹ Hipsters are known as explicitly anti-conformist, applauding all things different and unique. These people, often very young, are almost obsessively interested in music and popular culture. Hipsters are “scene-sters,” the young mods, who are always hanging out at coffee shops, music venues, quirky art openings, and such – traveling from one scene to another, often via bicycle. Fashion is very important to this group, but only a certain kind of fashion; they never wear things traditionally thought of as “fashionable,” unless, ironically, but rather they are very focused on dress as a way to express their individuality. They highlight the unusual aspects of their own bodies and appearance, dressing in a manner that showcases oddity and peculiarity. They also use many accessories that serve to further distinguish them from one another. They place a high value on the different, the odd, the absurd, and the incongruent. They like to consider themselves marked by an extreme curiosity about the world but may in fact be very uncertain of the self, seeking to secure the self through difference; in seeing themselves against a diverse background, they are able to feel more unique and more real.

It’s important to note however the degree to which “hipness” has been taken over by the mainstream, thereby affecting our understanding of what it even means to be a hipster. For many, appearing as a hipster is still a form of conformity, even if under the guise of rejection. In a sense, one who “tries too hard” is by definition not hip or cool. There is in distinction the person who may find himself “accidentally hip” just by being

⁷⁰ See her website: <http://www.ladygaga.com/#!/tweets-official> and Maureen Callahan’s *Poker Face: The Rise and Rise of Lady Gaga* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2010).

⁷¹ See, e.g., Roger Lanham, *The Hipster Handbook* (NY: Anchor Books, 2003).

who he is. (However, I do think it is difficult to avoid an awareness of whether or not what one does is “cool,” given the all-pervasiveness of trends, etc. in western culture.) One who ends up being a hipster unintentionally is not necessarily exhibiting bad faith, at least not in the same way as the more conforming mainstream hipster. The hipster of conformity is so dependent on the rejection of the mainstream, that she takes on the project of being a thing—a hip thing—as in the case of the waiter and later the masochist in *Being and Nothingness*.⁷²

Imitation and the Mirror

While one may seek to convince others of one’s trustworthiness by presenting the self as an ideal Other through seduction, one can also attempt to join others by becoming a perfect reflection of the Other through imitation. As Jacques Lacan argues concerning the mirror stage of child development, one comes to know oneself through mimicking the Other.⁷³ It’s through such mimicry that one, as a child, comes to know one’s body as one’s own. But the owning of the body in this way can easily become a masochistic emphasis on the objectification of the self.

As the person in bad faith who longs to be pure objectivity, to be an object in the

⁷² As genealogically linked to the beatniks of the 1950s and early 1960s, hipsters may wish to take heed of Sartre’s thought as he, too, was a hipster who no doubt offered much reflection on the pitfalls of hipness as a matter of self-reflection. Such acknowledgment continues, to some extent, in Sartre’s hipness having entered the cyber-age, as the twitter site *hipstersartre* attest.

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience,” in *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), pp. 75–81.

world of other objects, the masochist relies on a self-constitution through recognition, which is why she invests so much time in mirroring and duplicating the look of the Other, thus diminishing her own individuality or subjectivity. The commercial fashion industry lends itself to the mimicry of bad faith. In fact, through the importance placed on trends and “it” items, the industry is a prime perpetuator of this imitative masochism.⁷⁴

An individual appears to be a reflection of those she would like to seduce, those she would like to have focus their gaze on her.⁷⁵ This relationship is ironic since the motivation to fix the look of the Other as a reflection of the self involves her being what one would like to her to be. In effect, then, this effort of seduction is premised upon already having being seduced. Dress sets up a mirror of the Other to draw others in. In reference to dress, the mirror can be discussed in two ways: the mirror as reflection of the self, pointing to the vanity that is almost inherently connected to clothing, and the mirror as duplication of the self, in the sense of individuals dressed identical to one another. This latter sense is the one I would like to address.

Jacques Lacan took up the theme of the mirror in his seminal work on the mirror stage of child development.⁷⁶ Lacan’s analysis of the mirror stage contributes much to this Sartrean discussion of over-identification with objectivity. The primary focus of the “mirror stage” analysis is that it is only through accepting that a point of view can be taken on an individual, and acknowledging that one can be seen from that outside perspective, that one comes to know oneself as an image/self in the world. The notion of

⁷⁴ For more on this idea, see the book *It* by Joseph Roach.

⁷⁵ It’s no coincidence that I am using terms having to do with love and intimacy. These two ideas are quite at the heart of this issue, a matter I will address in the latter part of this dissertation. The seductive element of dress gets at the ways we use our clothing to pull others towards us, revealing the deep levels at which we desire relationship.

⁷⁶ Jacques Lacan, *op. cit.*

the mirror, or reflection, is especially pertinent to this discussion of masochism because the mirror, physically and psychologically speaking, is that which enables the self to know itself as something (an object) to be seen. More metaphorically, one may seek to be surrounded by those others who will provide an approximate reflection of one's self (in the senses spoken of above) back to the individual.

For Merleau-Ponty, it seems that the "I" encountered in the mirror stage is exactly the "I" that has become social, that has learned to see itself through the eyes of the other.⁷⁷ It is the "I" that knows itself as both subject and object. In the mirror, the child sees herself as an object to be looked at and as a subject who has a unique selfhood. The mirror is both authenticating and alienating. In Sartrean terms, self-discovery and alienation must occur at the same time. This is because for Sartre knowledge emerges from an act of differentiation, which he discusses as nihilation, negation, and distinction. Thus, for the self to be "discovered," it must also have been differentiated paradoxically from the act of its intention.

Although the mirror stage is a positive and necessary element in the development of our effort at a unified self, it reveals how easy it is to fall into imitation – or the infantile desire to understand the self purely as object when gazing at her own reflection. This is precisely the inclination that is abused in (serious) masochism.

Through the empathy resulting from the child's identification with her own image, and eventual identification with others, the world of others becomes real. "To recognize his image in the mirror is for him to learn that there can be a point of view

⁷⁷ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relation with Others," in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James Edie, trans. William Cobb (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964). See also John O'Neill, "The Specular Body: Merleau-Ponty and Lacan on Infant Self and Other," *Synthese* 66, no. 2 (February 1986): 201-217.

taken on him,” Merleau-Ponty writes.⁷⁸ Acknowledging that others may see her in ways she may not see herself grounds the acceptance that others exist and have their own subjectivity, their own point of view. Understanding “point of view” is a fundamental part of being human. While the mirror establishes one’s awareness of others, it is gained through a solidified understanding of the self paradoxically as another point of view (the one looking back at one in the mirror).

At the moment of apprehension of the Other, the child knows herself as complete. As the individual comes to understand the possibility of being viewed and gazed upon, the self begins to see itself as an object. But only in looking at her self in the mirror can the child understand herself as an individual, a subjectivity as well. The self plays a dual role as both observer and observed, joining subject and object. There is, as we have seen, a paradoxical self-reflexivity at work in that one is looking at oneself as an Other, being legitimated by one’s own gaze, but one’s own gaze as Other. A person sees herself as constructed by others, but she is the “Other” self who does the constructing. She needs the other for recognition, but when looking in the mirror she becomes that Other. Through understanding this aspect of the mirror stage, one sees that knowledge of self and knowledge of others are inextricably connected.

Ultimately, one knows oneself when one accepts the constantly defining gaze of the other. As Lacan writes, “what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside.”⁷⁹ As such the gaze of the Other only legitimates one, when one is made into a mere superficial image. Lacan sensed the close link between

⁷⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Child’s Relation with Others,” in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James Edie, trans. William Cobb. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1964), 136.

⁷⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 106.

reflection of the self and representation. In the moment of self-discovery that occurs at the mirror stage, one becomes merely a representation of oneself.

The mirror aids an individual in knowing the self, as in the psychological mirror stage; it is in light of the gaze of the Other. Therefore, at the moment of self-realization, one is also made aware of the existence of others. In light of knowledge of others, one is incorporated into a constant exchange of glances. One realizes that one sees oneself as “being seen.” The self one sees in the mirror is always a construction, a fabrication fashioned under the gaze of the Other. The authentic self then is lost; it is always known as an absence. Additionally, in the mirror stage, one sees the birth of the symbolic and the imaginary, as well as the development of the sense of play and the faculty of identification (that serves as the groundwork for empathy).

One seeks to mirror others because it relieves a person of the responsibility to live for oneself as an individual. And also, one becomes a mirror – a literal object – a mere reflection, an illusion. This kind of bad faith masochism creates the self a simple physical reflection of the other.

Imitation and Clothing

How does this tendency to imitate the other manifest itself through clothing? There are so many instances of imitation in fashion from contemporary culture, but a few examples will suffice. Many groups perpetuate a total assimilation in the ways they dress. Individuals begin to morph into one another, looking more and more alike until they are

almost indistinguishable from each other. From teenage sorority girls who all dress identically in an effort to mirror each other (in order to be included) to older women who have begun to emulate celebrities in ways that make them appear as carbon copies of each other, a kind of wholesale imitation is taking over the commercial fashion industry. Styles of dress promote more and more conformity, whether because of the advent of a new form of label-conscious purchasing or simply because of technology and plastic surgery enabling people to more or less mimic one another. The cultural forces that condone mimicry are allowing for forms of societally approved masochism.

Such styles of dress are also more prevalent among certain workers and skilled laborers. In fact, uniforms demonstrate this exact point: if a person is to be valued for some sort of work or skill – in the sense of a technical worker, nurse, doctor, or student – then she may as well look the same as the person next to her. Uniforms strip one of subjectivity. And yet, the masochist seeks this form of recognition.

The social group loosely defined as “preppy” also illustrates this phenomenon rather well. Preppies, it seems, seek being seen as “fitting in.” They frequently dress in ways that are more or less identical – the men wear business suits, the girls tend to keep sweaters and pearls around their necks while walking in their matching flip-flops. Even their hair is uniformly straightened in an attempt to capture a preppie ideal of beauty. The caricature of the Stepford wife, who possessing standard beauty and a quiet demeanor, summarizes a lot of preppie female stereotypes. This excessive degree of conformity among images of the upper class can be seen in the following quotes from students at Bolton Academy, a New England prep school. In her fascinating ethnography *Perfectly*

Prep, Sarah Chase reveals many of the underlying tensions – manifestations of bad faith – that these female students experience with regard to their appearance:

The girls describe how students ‘deck out’ at Bolton and how they dress similarly. Certain brands such as J. Crew, Lilly, Vineyard Vines, North Face, Ralph Lauren, and Abercrombie and Fitch serve as the model for the students. One girl explains, ‘Individuals tend to dress just like other individuals, so everyone is almost dressed alike.’ Tellingly, one girl asks, ‘How many times have you seen the same outfit on, like, five different people?’ Her friend agrees that many of the students are ‘like J. Crew mannequin models.’⁸⁰

It seems that people like preppies crave similarity because they long to see themselves reflected back to them. Their egos are simultaneously overgrown and fragile, so the homogeneous dressing that is demonstrated in this group is a manifestation of the effort to solidify and stabilize the self through a kind of mirroring or self-imitation.

However, these individuals may be convinced that they are engaged in a serious project of self-expression. As Bjorn Schiermer has written of the fashion victim: “He dresses up. His ‘work’ is composed and put together in the conviction of an individual expression of his self. [...] In fact, as it turns out, it naked mimesis that guided the efforts from the outset. Exactly where the [fashion] victim thinks himself authentic and creative, he excels in clichés and stereotypes.”⁸¹

Extreme Cases of Masochistic Bad Faith in Dress

In tightening the focus on masochism in dress, I want to show how this kind of

⁸⁰ Sarah A. Chase. *Perfectly Prep: Gender Extremes at a New England Prep School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96.

⁸¹ Schiermer, Bjorn. “Fashion Victims: On the Individualizing and De-individualizing Powers of Fashion.” *Fashion Theory*. Vol 14, no 1. 87.

bad faith is manifested through clothing in three specific ways:

- (1. Under-dressing or choosing not to dress (nakedness);
- (2. Overdressing or focus on clothing as performance/masks;
- (3. Playing the game in the Fashion Industry – giving oneself over to the game of fashion; The Beauty Myth

Some aspects of these tendencies have been explored, but these inclinations are worth further explanation. Both underdressing and overdressing are at root an inclination toward exhibitionism. Whether dressed or undressed, the exhibitionist longs to expose her naked self; she behaves flamboyantly and outlandishly in seeking to gain attention from others. The desire to reveal her naked flesh is not to be overlooked; it is precisely in this exposure of the intimate nature of flesh that shame may be brought forth most vividly. As Sartre observes:

Modesty and in particular the fear of being surprised in a state of nakedness are only a symbolic specification of original shame; the body symbolizes here our defenseless state as objects. To put on clothes is to hide one's object-state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is, to be pure subject. That is why the Biblical symbol of the fall after the original sin is the fact that Adam and Eve "know that they are naked." The reaction of shame will consist exactly in apprehending as an object the one who apprehended *my* own object-state.⁸²

In addition, although clothing hides what lays beneath, it also highlights the objective, embodied self, exposure of the flesh places greater emphasis on this fact. The exhibitionist is the finest example of the masochist.⁸³

Nakedness is contrasted with the masochist who dresses to become an object for

⁸² Sartre *BN*, p. 384.

⁸³ Ironically, this exposure of the self is only paradoxical – as the exhibitionist reveals her flesh, in an attempt to be known through acknowledgement by the other, she denies herself the ability to ever be known as a union of subjectivity and objectivity.

others and to forget her freedom through being lost in clothing that makes her constrained by the gaze of others. Nakedness should be contrasted with nudity.⁸⁴ The former is bare, pure objecthood, thingness. The latter, however, is paradoxical. In nudity, there is the presence of human agency and responsibility, where in how the body is posed or lived, it is without vulnerability but is instead expression. In a nude community or in the context of art, nudity is the body clothed by the symbolic force of meaning. Nudity can, then, be an expression of suspended seriousness about the body, a form of play. Yet this potential of nudity could be transformed into a manifestation of bad faith in a variety of ways.

The nude's absence of nakedness could make the Other experience a sense of nakedness through shame or embarrassment at looking at the nude in an inappropriate way. That Other's gaze in effect turns upon itself in a sense of objectification through shame. In that relationship, the nude is more like the Sartrean sadist who objectifies the other through making the self appear disembodied, for the nude, in such a context, transforms nakedness of the body through making the body seemingly disappear. If the nude attempts to fix the gaze of the other on the body, however, in the relation of desire, the result would be as a desired desire, which, as Sartre shows, is a manifestation of (bad faith) love and masochism. Sartre's critique of masochism and sadism is that both slide into each other—to control others leads to being controlled by such an effort, where sadism becomes masochism, masochism becomes sadism—the result is an abrogation of freedom.

Our discussion of the symbolic force of nudity and its potential for bad faith brings to the fore the phenomenological significance of dress even in the apparently bare

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Kenneth Clark's *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

body, for nudity reveals itself to be as “read-able” as clothing. As Ruth Barcan noted in her book *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*: “nakedness is intersubjective; it could not exist without the gaze of the other.”⁸⁵ There is no way to escape the dilemma of reconciling objectification from an Other and individual transcendent subjectivity. Although it may seem as if nudity is a return to a pre-deceptive state where the difficulties inherent in clothing have vanished, this idea would be misguided. As Barcan put it, “nudity is not a state to be idealized; language and clothing are both necessarily alienated and alienating, but they are nonetheless productive of human subjectivity and sociality.”⁸⁶ Even the bad faith masochist who reverts to a state of total nudity to eschew the individuating aspects of clothing is still an inherent subjectivity, whether she acknowledges it to herself or not.

While there are nudist camps and colonies about and many may be steeped in masochistic bad faith, this attitude can be manifest in ways that are not quite as extreme. Some do not go so far as to embrace total nudity at all times, but there are those who refuse to engage with actual fashion or clothing at all. Many wear intentionally threadbare clothes or intentionally unattractive and unappealing clothing or refuse to choose what to wear. Perhaps they believe, like the contemporary hipster, that choosing or exercising concern for such matters might display too much of a concern with recognition, conformity, and thus their objectification.

Finally, there is the individual who so longs for relationship that she throws herself completely into a group. The masochist regards not only the Other but also others as an ideal, she sees the Other and others as everything. She is willing not only to change but also to become anything for the sake of joining the group. She, like the café waiter, is

⁸⁵ Ruth Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy* (London: Berg Publishers, 2004), 23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 51.

as a being-in-itself, always determined by her audience. Although she ultimately sacrifices her autonomy to become a member of the group, she forgets that it was voluntary or tells herself the lie that the group made her who she is and imputes to them a material authority – that it was objectively legitimate for that group to have such a right. She adopts a spirit of seriousness in which the dictates of the group exist beyond one’s choosing. This materialization of value, combined with masochistic self-objectification, leads to her entanglement in bad faith. Unfortunately, this is a circumstance faced by many, if not most, women.

Fashion, or an obsession with appearance, has historically been considered strictly a “women’s realm.” But how exactly are women more guilty of this kind of offering of the self for objectification—i.e., masochism? Whether against their will or through their own choice, it is commonplace to acknowledge that women are frequently more culturally objectified than men. As such, they are frequently more victimized, more often stripped of liberty, and more frequently referred to through body-focused and objectifying terms. Along with this seemingly unavoidable objectification that appears to be a necessary fact of femininity, women are also thought to be uniquely deceitful and shameful. This mentality is a reflection of sex and gender norms as forms of the spirit of seriousness. Because many women feel particularly victimized in their life circumstances, they adopt a bad faith attitude toward their identity, uniquely manifested through dress, make up, among other aspects of their embodiment. Iris Marion Young addresses this point brilliantly in her essay “Five Faces of Oppression.” In an effort to elucidate the distinct motives behind oppressive acts, she deals with the formation of groups, a concern with which Sartre has much affinity in his later work, the *Critique of Dialectical*

*Reason.*⁸⁷ Young points out that:

One of the main contributions of poststructuralist philosophy has been to expose as illusory this metaphysic of a unified self-making subjectivity, which posits the subject as an autonomous origin or an underlying substance to which attributes of gender, nationality, family, role, intellectual disposition, and so on might attach. Conceiving the subject in this fashion implies conceiving consciousness as outside of and prior to language and the context of social interaction, which the subject enters.⁸⁸

For Young, “groups constitute individuals,” instead of the individual being ontologically prior to the group. In this sense, she is contributing a particular kind of nuance to the understanding of Sartrean facticity.⁸⁹ *Is a group a part of one’s facticity? Or is the group yet another distraction from the being-for-itself?*

In a group, people see themselves simultaneously as both doubled and different – appealing to their narcissistic tendencies and desire for an other to validate them through the other’s gaze. Groups of people who more or less dress identically accomplish these dual goals most effectively. Hence, the margin of differentiation is very small and is determined according to each group’s sensibilities and values. Some groups are composed of people who are more narcissistic; therefore, their dress has to reflect themselves more closely, with more emphasis on drawing attention to them more than to others in the group, versus groups whose search for the Other is more pronounced, allowing for a lack of emphasis on the self in their attire.

⁸⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. 1, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. by Jonathan Rée, foreword by Frederic Jameson (London: Verso, 2004).

⁸⁸ Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” from *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 45.

⁸⁹ Her account is in direct contrast to Sartre. If it’s true that “our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups which are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms” then we are always in bad faith. See Young, 46.

The Fashion Victim

As Bjorn Schiermer recounts in his *Fashion Theory* article “Fashion Victims: On the Individualizing and De-individualizing Powers of Fashion”: “an essential trait of fashion victimization is the display of excess.”⁹⁰ For Schiermer, closely following Simmel’s writings on the “Modenarr,” the fashion victim is the person who thinks she is playing the game, but exaggerates each trend to such a degree that ultimately she appears ridiculous. Additionally, she is unaware of her own ridiculousness – she is, in fact, convinced that she looks good, that she has achieved the highest level fashion through the emphatic embracing of certain styles.

The fashion victim then is the prime example of a person in bad faith. Schiermer writes, “What is at stake in fashion is rather a problem of a socio-existential nature: in the eyes of the beholder, the fashion victim has lost himself to blind social dynamics in objects that are considered too common, overtly ‘fashionable,’ clichéd or stereotypical.”⁹¹ The fashion victim, as the paradigmatic bad faith masochist, sets herself up for disappointment. Schiermer adds: “A fashion victim, as we have seen, is an individual who negates his own individuality in the very act of exercising it.”⁹²

Conclusion: Exposure

Because bad faith is fundamentally a lie to the self, a lie in which the self knows

⁹⁰ Schiermer, 86

⁹¹ Ibid. 87

⁹² Ibid. 91.

she is lying, one who is engaged in a bad faith perspective always fears exposure, being found out, being forced to face the truth of freedom. This fear of exposure is incredibly significant in this discussion. It is no coincidence, I think, that being exposed is the opposite of being dressed. Clothing, as the literal covering of our bodies, conceals the exposure that those in bad faith most fundamentally fear. In reference to clothing and bad faith, this fear of exposure takes two forms – both issues of “fit”: not fitting the body and not fitting the group. If we think more literally about the example of clothing, when would clothing be likely to expose something intended to be hidden? Precisely when it doesn't fit. So this idea of not fitting, or rather, not fitting in, becomes very pertinent to the discussion.

One of my most embarrassing moments as a child occurred during a lunch stop at a McDonald's during a family vacation. During the previous four-hour car trip my shoes had become misplaced among all the luggage in the back seat of the car. I was forced to wear my father's much-too-big tennis shoes into the fast-food restaurant. I still remember the feelings of shame and embarrassment which I felt as it seemed that everyone in this crowded restaurant was staring at me wearing clothing that clearly did not fit. As a result, I felt that I inherently did not fit in. There are similar examples to be found throughout many people's experiences, for clothing allows for these highly orchestrated ways of “reading” someone's body to see if they “fit.” Do they fit into their body? Do they fit into their clothes? Do their clothes fit into our group? This multi-tiered experience of “fitting in” is at the heart of one's anxiety over joining groups. But at the very deepest level is a profound existential fear of being found as an outsider, of fundamentally “not fitting in,” or being exposed as an imposter or a phony.

To be exposed is to be cast out, revealed as an imposter, an outsider, an unknown. This is so great a fear because to be “known” as a self, an individual, is ultimately to be known in context, specifically in the context of a group. And to be cast out is to lose context, and therefore lose identity. (However, the even bigger Sartrean irony is that to be a self is to exist in freedom, and the freedom to choose your context, and/or what to do given the context.)

But the twist is that the bad faith masochist is someone who explicitly desires to be an exhibitionist, to expose herself whether through nudity, highlighting her objectification, or through exhibitionistic, flamboyant, over-the-top clothing.⁹³ So, even though her deepest fear is of exposure (real exposure, not fitting in), she explicitly plays with fire by intentionally exposing herself in other ways. Perhaps this is also another way of maintaining the lie: “See, I’ve exposed myself already, see how honest I am, how vulnerable I am....” The exhibitionist “longs to expose her naked self... either physically or psychologically.” The exhibitionistic masochist realizes that exposure (or vulnerability) is the way to gain trust from others, yet she doesn’t maintain a balance. The exhibitionist specifically exposes parts of the body to attract attention, recognition, and acknowledgement. In the masochistic attitude, there is a paradoxical “exposure” of the self, but only the self as an object. For the masochist, behaving in a way to attract attention is an end in itself. With such a focus on objectification, the masochist prevents herself from ever being known as an embodied subjectivity.

I cannot pass over what is the most mythological instance of exposure and expulsion. The idea of being cast out of context is where this issue meets another very important story in the history of clothing – the story of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve

⁹³ Nudity is where we all become objects — see Barcan.

were cast out of the Garden of Eden once their nakedness was revealed. The great, embedded fear in bad faith is that of exposure. And while bad faith is always, ultimately, an attempt to hide, at times through an attempt to “fit in,” then the risk is always that of exclusion and expulsion from the garden.

A feature of modern society is the underlying conviction that ultimately no personal thought or experience is out of reach. In effect, that makes modern society one of constant exposure. Intimacy in relationships is sacrificed in such an environment of exposure, for how could the intimate be met if everything is in principle available to all? And more, where freedom is the premium value, how could intimacy be met where reaching to the other is understood as risking one’s own freedom? At some point, independence must yield to such a sacrifice.

Fashion, too, offers the challenge of acceptance and defiance. In order to be accepted by others, in polite society, or in fashionable society, people must accept not only the inevitability of clothing but also its conditions of meaning.

Because fashion is one of the very first cultural cues individuals send out to others, they simply must be aware of what message they are sending. And they must make some compromises in order to gain the benefit of creating relationships with others. Society may have been based on a lie, and we may all be actors, but without these seemingly “inauthentic” attitudes, we are all alone.

CHAPTER FOUR:

BAD FAITH SADISM: REPULSION AND INVISIBILITY

“But everything happens as if I wished to get hold of a man who runs away and leaves only his coat in my hands. It is the coat, it is the outer shell which I possess. I shall never get hold of more than a body, a psychic object in the midst of the world.”

Jean-Paul Sartre

As much as clothing may be utilized to seduce others and draw others toward the self, it may also be used to build barriers, to protect the self and put up walls of distinction and separation. While the bad faith masochist longs to meld with the other, literally becoming the other in her flee from freedom and responsibility, the bad faith sadist not only desires to separate herself completely from the other, but also to deny the other her own subjectivity. It is not enough for the sadist to be severed from any kind of dependence on another, but she must rob others of their legitimate freedom. Her behavior therefore creates a barrier that prohibits genuine relationship from occurring.

Clothing facilitates this attitude in a unique way. The element of masquerade that is an almost unavoidable aspect of clothing contributes to, and feeds off of, a sadistic attitude of bad faith. Additionally, the sadistic impulse toward invisibility, or becoming a disembodied transcendence, may be seen in an individual's relationship to clothing. Finally, the kind of cruelty or humiliation that the sadistic attitude ultimately manifests toward others can be read as a sort of underlying theme in the fashion industry. In looking at these aspects of contemporary individuals' interactions with clothing, one may come to see how sadistic behaviors produce a two-sided blindness. While the sadist seeks

to control the world by being the sole point of view by which it into an object, her efforts collapse into their opposite, as we have seen in our discussion of masochism. The sadist attempts to see without being seen, which leads to her failure of seeing how her investments lead to her, in effect, being seen. Her self-sabotaging narcissism is particularly fueled through experiences surrounding clothing.

Sadism and the Other

Both sadistic and masochistic manifestations of bad faith arise out of interactions with the Other. While bad faith is a fundamental lie to the self, it relies, as discussed, on social conditions for its possibility. Although for Sartre bad faith is possible in all aspects of human reality, it is clear that desire (as we saw in the previous chapter) is intricately bound up with these issues of bad faith. Sartre writes: “Desire is an attempt to strip the body of its movements as of its clothing and to make it exist as pure flesh; it is an attempt to incarnate the Other’s body.”⁹⁴ Where masochism is characterized by the desire to be desired, sadism is characterized by the desire to control and possess.

As with masochism, there is the distinction between playing sadism and serious sadism. The former, as in sexual play, has limits; its purpose, in the realm of role-playing, offers the respect of agency where the masochist could, in principle, say “stop.” The serious sadist, however, will not yield because of being serious about the project of erasing the freedom of the Other.

Social relations fuel serious sadism in precisely the following way: when encountering an Other in a social interaction, the person in bad faith experiences an

⁹⁴ Sartre, 506.

intense incompatibility between the two transcendent freedoms (of the self and the other). This anguish or anxiety developed in the face of two irreconcilable freedoms leads the sadist to choose how to treat the Other in a way that does not compromise the sadist's own freedom. The sadist resolves to preserve her freedom (or in this case actually exaggerate her existing freedom) through viewing or treating the Other (and others) strictly as an object or an instrument. The sadist then becomes the sole freedom or perspective of consciousness.

In this desire to become an all-encompassing freedom to the detriment of the Other's freedom, the sadistic individual enforces a regimented objectification of the Other. This objectification leads to indifference toward the Other at best; hatred culminating in harsh violence and/or humiliation directed toward the Other at worst, in the most intense scenarios. For Sartre, the sadism/masochism dichotomy is a desire to transcend the Other or to be transcended. He writes: "What the sadist seeks to appropriate is in actuality the transcendent freedom of the victim. But this freedom remains on principle out of reach. And the more the sadist persists in treating the other as an instrument, the more this freedom escapes him."⁹⁵

While the masochist is an exhibitionist, the sadist is the voyeur. The sadist longs to be nothing but a disembodied viewpoint. While masochism is losing oneself in over-identification with being the Other, sadism is losing intersubjectivity in lack of empathy in order to achieve social dominance as pure subjectivity. The sadist longs to be a pure viewpoint, in which the Other is strictly and only an object to be seen.

But when the sadist is forced to recognize her own objectivity and/or embodiment, her attitude toward the other becomes more extreme and harsh. This is

⁹⁵ Ibid, 525.

when the sadist begins to act toward the other with actual cruelty or violence in mind. This is most often illustrated in behaviors that humiliate the other. Specifically for Sartre, “the sadist does not seek to suppress the freedom of the one whom he tortures but to force this freedom to freely identify itself with the tortured flesh.”⁹⁶ The sadist seeks to inflict pain, violence, and torture on the other; most basically this is achieved through viewing the other as an instrument. “In sadism the emphasis is put on the instrumental appropriation of the incarnated Other.... sadism is a refusal to be incarnated and a flight from all facticity and at the same time an effort to get hold of the Other’s facticity,” Sartre writes.⁹⁷ The Other must appear dramatically and strictly as objectified flesh in order to satisfactorily reaffirm the sadist’s absolute transcendence. To accomplish this, “the sadist treats the Other as an instrument in order to make the Other’s flesh appear...”⁹⁸ This aspect of sadism is very important to keep in mind as I begin to unravel the ways in which clothing in general and the fashion industry in particular bolster and nurture a sadistic bad faith dynamic.

Differentiation

While it is a natural human inclination to long for union or to become one with the other, it is also a natural inclination to seek to differentiate the self from the other.⁹⁹ The act or experience of differentiation is fundamental to the construction of the self. In

⁹⁶ Ibid, 523.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See Georg Simmel for more on this point.

fact, it is through differentiation that the self is in a sense acquired, gained, earned, or bestowed upon an individual. But, an exaggerated need to differentiate is what leads to sadism. When the normal desire for self-differentiation become misplaced or misunderstood, then ideas of possession and control lead to issues of sadism.

In the phenomenological tradition writers speak of the moment of self-differentiation as the instant one comes to know one's "ownness." The importance of this concept to sadism is significant. Sadism is simultaneously an excessive desire to differentiate oneself from others and an inability to effectively differentiate – specifically, to acknowledge the Other as a unique self. The sadist longs to be differentiated from others to such a degree that she sees herself as the only ego capable of experiencing genuine subjectivity. In a sense, though, everything has become one's *own*, or rather un-differentiated from the self.

It is also through understanding this concept of ownness that one may see the sadistic self as solipsistic. While the world is a part of one's experience, one is also part of the Other's intentional experience of the world. Sadism is a failure to recognize this analogy between the self, others, and the intersubjective relationship constitutive of sociality; the sadist could therefore be characterized by a failure to see or acknowledge reciprocity.

For Sartre, when one perceives an Other, it is often first as a body, as an object, a thing. Yet, the serious sadist is never able to move beyond this initial objectification of the Other. The masochist needs the gaze of the other for definition, while the sadist needs to objectify the other through acts of differentiation. This existential desire for differentiation has many different manifestations. One relevant example is found in

adolescence. The early teen years are the time when most tribal rites of passage occur; it is also not a coincidence that this is the time when bodies literally change from childlike to adult – and are therefore capable of adult functions.¹⁰⁰ The years from twelve to eighteen represent the period of time when most individuals are heavily invested in forming their personality, or rather, creating their personality and very clearly differentiating themselves as individuals. They are given responsibility in certain areas and are beginning to be viewed as adults, as fully accountable and responsible persons.

A hugely visible manifestation of this creation of personality is related to clothing and appearance. In fact, the modification procedures that accompany some rites of passage into adulthood are physical, bodily reminders of one's place or one's responsibility within the group.¹⁰¹ It is interesting to note that within tribal forms of initiation there is the implied idea that reaching adulthood is a privilege, a badge of honor to be won. In the United States today, however, adulthood is seen as an ominous and unpleasant sign of growing old. Many would rather not take on responsibility or accountability, preferring to hold onto childhood indefinitely.

If sadism can be understood as a breakdown or failure to differentiate appropriately – either through a total disregard for others or a misplaced control over others (especially the freedom of others), then it would follow that a sadistic individual would be greatly invested in playing with the idea of boundaries. Clothing itself represents a variety of boundaries. It highlights the boundaries of the body. It is the

¹⁰⁰ In fact, the idea of an extended adolescence, as is commonly recognized in the United States, is a fairly recent invention. It used to be the case that children progressed directly to adulthood, in one brief moment.

¹⁰¹ Such mutilation still occurs in a variety of places; for example: ear piercing, tattooing, and fraternity brothers who brand each other with a hot branding iron to signify fraternal bonding and belonging.

boundary between intimate flesh and the social body-for-others. Clothing also represents boundaries and barriers between others. Dress is a definer of social standing and class, as well as an indicator of religion, ethnic membership, gender, and, as with queer fashion, sexual orientation.

Masks and Masquerade

A particularly relevant manner of speaking of differentiation in dress is to ruminate on the masquerade quality of dress. As a mask, clothing sets up an obvious boundary between the self and others as it presents an actual physical barrier. It clearly defines, through all the elements of costume, who an individual is (or desires to be). But when regarded as strictly a costume, the question of sincerity in dress surfaces. A costume implies taking on a persona, donning a mask, and allowing the person beneath to remain hidden. It is a way to see and not be seen. As Robert J. Weber writes in *The Created Self*:

Masks [also] give us the license to be someone else, hiding the usual self. As such, they are different than makeup, tattoos, and the like. With these forms, we are not hiding who we are, just changing some aspect of our appearance, perhaps to perfect it. But with masks we become someone or something else, and at the same time we hide who we are.¹⁰²

Gilles Lipovetsky outlines the ways in which clothing allows one to “change one’s skin,” to become an alternate self, to metamorphose as though wearing a mask: “Visit the grand dressmakers and you will feel not like you are in a shop, but rather in a

¹⁰² Richard Weber. *The Created Self: Reinventing Body, Persona, Spirit*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 186.

portrait studio of an artist who will make your dresses ‘a portrait and a likeness of yourself.’” He continues, “The psychologizing of appearance is accompanied by the narcissistic pleasure of transforming oneself in one’s own eyes and those of others, of ‘changing one’s skin’ – or feeling like – and becoming – someone else, by changing the way one dresses.” In this way, fashion “help[s] women to exist.”¹⁰³

Yet J.C. Flugel, whose *Psychology of Clothes* details many of the motives behind the human need for clothing, most clearly identifies the very act of wearing clothes as donning a mask:

When we wear a mask, we cease, to some extent, to be ourselves; we conceal from others both our identity and the natural expression of our emotion, and in consequence, we do not feel the same responsibility as when our faces are uncovered; for it appears to us that, owing to our unrecognizability, and the alteration in our personality, what we may do in our masked state cannot be brought up as evidence against us when we resume our normal unmasked lives. The masked person is, therefore, apt to be freer and less inhibited, both in feeling and in action, and can do things from which he might otherwise be impeded by fear or shame. Hence the highwayman, the burglar, and the executioner have frequently worn masks, and a masked ball permits of the less restrained expression of certain tendencies, notably the erotic ones, than is otherwise possible.¹⁰⁴

The above quote demonstrates the ways in which the “mask of clothing” or the fashion mask may be equated with the forms of deceit. Both the sadist and the masochist of Sartrean bad faith could be said to wear a mask in that they both conceal their full identities – the masochist by clinging to the material and objective nature of the mask and the sadist by refusing to acknowledge her own embodiment and preferring the invisibility

¹⁰³ Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 79.

¹⁰⁴ John Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), 52.

of the mask.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the “mask is a means of erasing personal identity,” Dani Cavallro writes in *Fashioning the Frame*: “The coexistence of concealment and exposure, insulation and mediation, is one of the principal features of all screening garments and is conveyed by their explicit incarnation of the imperative of secrecy and the attendant invitation to unmask the secret.”¹⁰⁶

For many, the association of fashion with a mask stems from the ongoing affiliation between clothing and women. As Ruth Barcan argues in *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*:

The masquerade, both as historical practice and as metaphor, has likewise been a cultural site in which the complexities of gender, identity, and desire have been played out in contradictory and politically uncertain ways. ... [some view] femininity itself as a kind of masquerade. ... Womanliness is worn like a mask.¹⁰⁷

And additionally concerning make-up: “Imagined as a form of clothing or mask, [makeup] has been regarded as a sign of in-authenticity. A long tradition sees makeup as part of the feminine repertoire of masquerade techniques, an artifice used to disguise authentic identity.”¹⁰⁸ Clement of Alexandria purported that “applying things unsuitable to the body, as if they were suitable, begets a practice of lying and a habit of falsehood... they turn their faces into masks.”¹⁰⁹ Additionally, according to Richard Brilliant: “[Masks and faces] are both transparent and opaque, because such masks conceal the being within from others, blocking their access to it, while simultaneously making a social

¹⁰⁵ In *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body*, Cavallro and Warwick even refer to a mask as an “exhibitionistic disguise” – perfectly describing a sado-masochistic attitude toward clothing.

¹⁰⁶ Warwick and Cavallro, 129

¹⁰⁷ Barcan, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Efrat Tseelon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*. (London: Sage Publications Ltd. 1995), 35.

commitment to these same others by presenting some visible, comprehensible form of the self that might be recognized.”¹¹⁰

How is clothing like a mask and how is a mask symbolic of a manifestation of (serious) sadism? Masquerade, or wearing a costume, is an inevitable aspect of fashion. Beyond the fact that clothing literally covers the body, clothing allows for the creation of artifice, or persona, through various garments and the symbolic power of clothing. As Flugel wrote in his seminal text, *The Psychology of Clothes*:

Gorgeous or voluminous clothes, the shape of which departs largely from that of the human frame itself, tend to substitute an artificial sartorial body for the natural corporeal body, and, by disguising the latter almost beyond recognition, to create the illusion that man is different than what he really is... Our bodies with all their imperfections persist underneath; and since they constitute a more essential, permanent, and inescapable part of our being, than our clothes, the reality principle demands that we should make our peace with them and live with them on terms, if not of affection, at least of toleration.¹¹¹

Types of Masks

Masquerade is in a sense necessary to fashion, but how is that masquerade fleshed out, so to speak, in the actual garments one wears? The concept of a mask in reference to clothing may be understood both positively and negatively. It seems plausible to break down the notion of mask into those which are *self-expressive* and those which are *self-constraining*. I would argue that self-expressive masks – or cases in which a person feels that she is uniquely expressing the self, but is in fact acting out of bad faith – are detrimental to others, while self-constraining masks – cases where a person in a sense

¹¹⁰ Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame* (New York: Berg Publishing, 1998), 130.

¹¹¹ Flugel, 222.

conceals his/her “true self” in order to adopt a certain social persona – are very beneficial to others. As Joanne Finkelstein puts it: “The controlled body is the passport to sociability.”¹¹²

One who wears clothing as a masquerade in the self-expressive sense may make herself believe she is *improving* upon the self – uncovering the “real self” through the covering over of the body. These individuals may use props as a means of creating a better, new and improved version of the self. They wear the body itself as a garment – something which may be taken on and off and exchanged for an updated version when the need arises. Robert Ezra Park describes this phenomenon well:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person in its first meaning is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. ...this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to -- this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be... We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become personas.¹¹³

Yet, as is the case with costume, despite the magnified “personality” of the character, the original person becomes *invisible*. They must for the masquerade to be effective. This invisibility, which is a component of masquerade, speaks to the kind of sadism that has been discussed. In an ironic over-emphasis on personality and persona, the wearer of the costume becomes lost, invisible.

Whether self-improving or self-constraining, when hidden under a mask, the self is altered or changed, put out of view. In a masquerade, an individual sees through

¹¹² Joanne Finkelstein, *The Art of Self Invention: Image and Identity in Popular Visual Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 97.

¹¹³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 19.

peepholes of the mask, but is not in turn seen for who she is. She is able to control the physical aspects of herself, and to defy her facticity, attempting to become, as it were, an absolute transcendence. This aspect of masquerade is what attracts the sadist to an overuse of clothing. The sadist uses clothing to hide, to become “invisible,” because as invisible, she cannot be identified. She is not bound by bodily constraints like others, therefore she is not responsible to others.

The sadistic interplay between masquerade and invisibility highlights the ways in which clothing allows us to hide in various roles. If the self desires to become invisible then the physical self that is presented must become a masquerade. So the self must choose what role, what persona he or she will play. In this sense, by controlling everything that the other sees, the sadist *masters* the gaze of the other, essentially denying the other’s basic human freedom to see what she desires to see. For the sadist, to be invisible is preferable, but second to that, controlling every aspect of one's appearance is desired. If one can control what the other perceives, then one controls the other.

Sadism is simultaneously a desire for invisibility in clothing and masquerade. In a sense, although donning a mask or wearing clothing as an extravagant costume may draw more attention to the self, it is also a way to appear invisible or to hide the self from being visible. While the physical actions and manifestations may be the same, when the masochist dresses flamboyantly the purpose is to *capture* the gaze of the other, for the true self to find meaning in the gaze of the other. In the case of the sadist however, masquerade is an attempt to separate the self from the other, to differentiate or distinguish, to put the self (or the bodily vulnerable self) “out of view,” so to speak, in order to leave nothing but the gaze.

It seems relevant to think of the medieval suit of armor. With his body completely encased in metal, the knight in his armor peers out of tiny slits that obscure even the appearance of his eyes. He is nothing but a warrior, acting and moving, but beyond harm. His armor seals his body, making it irrelevant as he moves forward as a killing machine. As mentioned before, fashion embodies this perspective in which the body appears as a garment. It is a picture of the armored self or clothing as armor.

But what is this transformed and masked body armored against? What the mask of clothing really concealing? What is the secret? Understanding clothing as a mask is also to see clothing as an attempt to avoid death, to conceal death, to conceal the fleshly body as the locus of death. For many, as seen in the case of the sadist, the fact of embodiment is too much. The living body itself is too harsh of a reminder of the inevitability of death and/or human finitude. The body represents the person as both subjectivity known through an objective nature. So in such instances, the body can only be desired when dead. Only then is the gravity and threat of human existence alleviated. And yet this sort of refusal or denial of death leads to a specific kind of existential death – bad faith. Just as the peasant rides away from the clutches of the Grim Reaper only to meet him in the next town, a denial of the body leads to inevitable death of the self. The idea of the mask is somehow linked to death, opposed to life. A mask is static, speaking to the still face of death. Uncovering some of the many facets of this idea of the mask may help reveal how a shift in terminology may help answer the dilemma of clothing through a perspective that is less susceptible to a bad faith attitude.

Although it is beyond the scope of the project at hand, much has been written on the association of beauty with death (and more unfortunately, the connection between

femininity, beauty, and death), but it is worth noting that the denial of the body as the site of illness, death, and disease is again a manifestation of bad faith.¹¹⁴ Beauty is most essentially a denial of (the ugliness of) death, but in so being, beauty often evokes (or taunts) death.

Masks have long been associated with religious rituals – both in primitive societies as well as more advanced cultures. A ritual is an elaborate (religiously oriented) game.¹¹⁵ “Spirit possession and masking represent different points along a continuum of techniques of identity display and transformation, but have in common that they both rely for their effectiveness upon semiotic processes that reveal not only what is displayed, but also that display is taking place.”¹¹⁶

It is significant to think of masks and spiritual possession as related aspects of the same phenomenon. As contemporary culture shifts towards an acceptance of avatars and shape-shifting, such as those found in computer games and vampire films, are we giving in to a form of “possession” akin to those of ancient times? To be “possessed” is not so far away from being “masked.” When possessed one is someone else, an “in-between,” a no-body – one is not responsible for one’s actions – or at least the one responsible. As a possessed, masked, no-body, one is dead – calling to mind the death of the self that results from the bad faith attitude.

In addition to the ways in which a mask taunts death through its use in religious

¹¹⁴ See Jacque Lynn Foltyn, “To Die For: Skull Style and Corpse Chic in Fashion Design, Imagery, and Branding,” *Scan Journal* 77, no. 2 (November 2010): http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=151 and Caroline Evans *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, Deathliness* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) for more on beauty and death.

¹¹⁵ Confession is a social game, a ritual of revelation. It is the socially-ordained space for revealing the self.

¹¹⁶ Donald Pollock. “Masks and the Semiotics of Identity.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1, number 3 (Sept 1995): 593.

rituals, where individuals are transformed in an effort to entice or appease gods or deities, masks can also be used to turn one individual into a representative of other individuals. As a representative, or a symbol of others, an individual presents a false version of the self – but not simply in presenting a substitute self, but in presenting a self that is more than it is. To present the self under a disguise is to present a self that is not true. But to allow the self to become a representation of a type (or a certain group of selves/individuals) is also not true, but because it is a false extension of the self, it is a self with additional meaning layered upon it. The individual has taken on a certain kind of responsibility as a representative that isn't otherwise present.

When used in a ritual, it may be clear that a mask is worn as part of a performance. In cases of everyday appearances, however, masks under the guise of fashion are not recognized as a display. The projected image is accepted as truth. (Only a veil gives the vivid awareness that display is taking place.)

Ultimately, to wear a mask is to attempt to control appearances, to control others' perception. It is a combination of control and deceit, exercised through performance. And wearing clothing as a mask manifests the same desire. The danger of the mask however is forgetting one is wearing it and coming to believe a pleasing falsehood. Instead of a reminder of freedom, becoming unmasked could bring humiliation and shame.¹¹⁷ Writes Benjamin Kilborne in *Disappearing Persons*: “The word ‘shame’ goes back to the Old High German root *scama*, ‘to cover oneself.’ Shame is ‘a cover, a mask.’ *Schemen* in modern German means ‘shadow’ or ‘ghost.’ Repeatedly we have seen how

¹¹⁷ We should remember Sartre's observation of the ironic dimension of sadism, however; controlling others is an effective way of being controlled through a loss of control;

the hiding of shame is about the shame of shame.”¹¹⁸ Most of our desire to cover our bodies at all has to do with shame – the fear of exposure and not fitting in. This need or urge to cover the self has many different facets, but in the case of a mask, it is known as deceit.

Invisibility: Sadism and the Fashion Industry

Although for most of this discussion I have been focusing on clothing rather than fashion (or the fashion industry proper) there is an important point here that should not be missed. The fashion industry, the commercial giant and all its accomplices, is responsible for the manufacture, advertisement, and distribution of most of the clothing in the west.¹¹⁹ One very important component of the fashion industry is fashion magazines. This so-called “beauty pornography” aims primarily at displaying runway garments and haute couture as well as profiling influential designers. However, the majority of the content of these magazines is advertisements in which any variety of beauty-related products are sold using exceptionally gorgeous photo-shopped models.

Feminist author Naomi Wolf wrote in her 1991 manifesto *The Beauty Myth* that these magazines are responsible for a unique kind of victimization of women. These magazines perpetuate the myth, Wolf claimed, that women must be physically beautiful and flawless to be useful or appreciated in society. These “lies,” it seems, support a certain kind of sadism specifically directed toward women.

While I have been discussing sadism in one of its milder manifestations, Sartre

¹¹⁸ Kilborne, 124.

¹¹⁹ I am speaking primarily of the United States, although the “fashion industry” as such is very connected to countries such as France and Italy.

makes it very clear in *Being and Nothingness* that sadism is in fact characterized by potential violence and often cruelty toward others. The sadist seeks to humiliate those whom she desires. Wolf's argument in *The Beauty Myth* seems to support the notion that these fashion magazines bolster sadistic bad faith attitude toward women, both by men against women and by women against women. This sadism is especially pronounced in the case of fashion advertisements – where women are always poised, eyes half-closed, dewy lipped, back arched – selling herself and her flesh – as an object of desire, devoid of subjectivity. Sartre even says of the sadist in *Being and Nothingness*, as she is desiring to constantly face the Other's body and objective embodiment: "The sadist handles the Other's body, leans on the Other's shoulders so as to bend him toward the earth and to make his haunches stick up, etc."¹²⁰ The sadist twists, turns, and manipulates the other to highlight the fleshliness of the body, to accentuate what is necessary to solidify the loss of the other's freedom.

Magazine editors, as partners in crime to the advertisers, embody this kind of sadism. It's not enough that the women appear so drained of their individuality and personality in these photos – both advertisements and the feature photo spreads – but, like Sartre writes, "the sadist does not seek to suppress the freedom of the one whom he tortures but to force this freedom to freely identify itself with the tortured flesh."¹²¹ She needs to literally become one with the tortured version of herself.

Essentially, what these fashion advertisements (and the myths they support) indicate is an instrumental view of women. This instrumental view of others (and the self) is at the heart of bad faith. Wolf describes it well: "In suggesting a vision in place of

¹²⁰ Sartre, 522.

¹²¹ Ibid, 523.

a woman, it has a numbing effect, reducing all senses but the visual, and impairing even that.”¹²² This is why fashion magazines are so susceptible to this kind of objectification – magazines are nothing but visual. The Beauty Myth perpetuates an instrumental, replaceable view of others. Instead of seeing others, especially women, as unique, both subjectively and objectively, the beauty myth “gives us the opposite prospect: If there is a set of features that is lovable, those features are replaceable.”¹²³

A related issue that illustrates the humiliating goals of a sadistic attitude is easily seen in the celebrity-driven tabloid magazine. While these tabloid magazines are primarily gossip rags, they are close cousins to fashion magazines proper, and they do contain a certain amount of fashion commentary – such as the “fashion do's and don'ts” section. These columns reflect a perspective that is very pervasive in the collective social consciousness – “Let's look, let's analyze and criticize every aspect of a person's physical presentation and if she comes up short, let's humiliate her.” The particular sections of a magazine that illustrate this mentality include photos of celebrities and average people, typically with their eyes blacked out, wearing a fashion “don't.” These fashion faux pas provide a chance for humiliation at the hands of magazine editors. They are a catalyst through which the sadistic magazine – the transcendent, all seeing eye of the editors – can highlight the most trivial sartorial transgressions of their victims.

The sadist hates others who have what she cannot have or those who do not have what she has. This feeling of hatred pervades the fashion industry in the modern world. The history of fashion is essentially a story of the “haves” and the “have nots” and the

¹²² Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), 174.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 172.

intense animosity and hatred that exists between them.¹²⁴ These related attitudes are symptoms of a very deep-rooted sadism. As a result, the entire fashion industry is built on a sadistic impulse – fashion magazines themselves are the all-seeing eye – disembodied, but judging from afar. Fashion “don’ts” editors mock people for their fashion foibles. Red carpet newscasts dissect even the most perfect celebrity starlet. All these reveal a sadistic inclination – I see you, I judge you, but I don’t have to be judged. This is not intersubjectivity. This is solipsism.

Women vacillate between these two extremes – objectification and label-conscious humiliation of one another – perpetuating each behavior with the other. Perhaps in exercising sadism some women think they are combating the objectification of masochism, but what happened to the middle? They’ve now become sadists instead of masochists – which seems like a positive change – but each attitude is really one side on the coin of bad faith.

It’s important to acknowledge that people who experience one of these desires may simultaneously experience the other.¹²⁵ Indeed there are many manifestations of both of these behaviors – some obvious and some not so obvious. These ideas and examples I presented are really intended to be a jumping off point for a larger discussion and are in no way intended to be comprehensive.

¹²⁴ For more see books on conspicuous consumption, label consciousness, luxury goods, etc. see Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dana Thomas’ *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster*, among many others.

¹²⁵ The corset, for example, serves both sadistic and masochistic purposes. In its sometimes painful restriction of the body, it both enhances a woman’s experience and awareness of her own body even in the disciplining of it.

Examples of Sadistic Dress

In its cruelty, sadism ultimately desires to see the other as pure object – an instrument or machine. There is no better way to accomplish this reduction of the other than to see her as a conglomerate of various parts, or as even one specific part, rather than a unified whole human being. There is a whole subset of fashion devoted to this kind of perspective on the other – fetish dress. At its core, fetishism is a love of the parts, over the whole - the object(s) over the subjective unifying nature. Common examples of fetish clothing are the corset, high heels, boots, uniforms of various kinds and anything made of leather or rubber. The most classic and recognizable example of a sadist in costume is the dominatrix. Costume historian Valerie Steele writes of the dominatrix in her book *Fetish*: “The costume of a dominatrix also implies a scenario in which certain wishes are expressed. She wears a mask: Therefore, she is anonymous; I don't want to know with whom I am having sex, and if I don't know, then perhaps she doesn't know who I am either. She looks menacing.”¹²⁶

There is a sense in which this focus on just one part of the whole person allows the sadist to construct a fantasy of the other, rather than seeing and experiencing a real, concrete, actual, living and breathing other. The sadist is comforted and aroused by the limited amount of the other she is allowed to see. This description from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's infamous *Venus in Furs* offers an excellent summary: “At the sight of her lying on the red velvet cushions, her precious body peeping out between the folds of sable, I realized how powerfully sensuality and lust are aroused by flesh that is only

¹²⁶ Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 169.

partly revealed.”¹²⁷ Although its arguable to say that sexuality is always to some extent grounded in fantasy, this kind of fantastical engagement with the Other is what leaves the door open for a unique kind of sadistic cruelty. “It is impossible to escape the impression that there is some kind of continuum between minor fetishistic and sadomasochistic ‘kinks’ and some of the ghastly serial crimes that culminate from an escalating chain of sexual fantasy and acting out.”¹²⁸

There is also a strange play with metaphor and symbolism at work in fetish wear. Although fetish clothing accentuates only one feature or body part of the whole, it also seeks to construct a symbol of a particular area of the body or specific garment. In this sense, the fetishist desires the whole, but can only focus on the part. She allows the garment, or the body part it represents, to stand in for the whole. It is her deep-rooted fear of the alienating power of the other that prohibits the fetishist/sadist from engaging the whole person in his encounter.

Outside the many obvious examples of sadistic/fetishistic expressions of dress in sexual situations, one common garment perfectly exemplifies the kind of sadistic attitude of which Sartre speaks. The classic men’s suit represents many of the ideals and desires one finds in sadism. As a garment, the suit is a direct descendent from armor.¹²⁹ This heritage is revealed in the fabric folds and the way that the suit creates a literal envelope of the body. Similar to armor, the suit fits the body and yet simultaneously obscures it, making the specific shape and contours of the person underneath uncertain. Traditionally worn with a tie, the suit and the shirt underneath leaves no part of the male exposed save

¹²⁷ Steele, 144.

¹²⁸ Glenn Wilson. *Variant Sexuality: Research and Theory*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 30.

¹²⁹ See Anne Hollander’s *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* for more on the history of the suit.

the head and the hands. No other typical ensemble is quite as completely covering and encasing as the suit. Additionally, most men wear a suit with an undershirt beneath a button-down shirt, socks along with lace-up shoes, and long extended boxer shorts under the pants. This excessive amount of bodily coverage shows the degree to which these men would like to gain a transcendent invisibility one that precisely characterizes the sadistic attitude towards others.

In a typical corporate office in America, self-expression, or even self-identification, is not respected or appreciated. In fact, it is often expected that a person will downplay any traits that makes one unique. So the suit is the ideal sartorial component to this sort of atmosphere. Instead of using clothing as a means of self-expression, in the office environment it is expected that one will stifle any reference to one's personality through one's wardrobe.¹³⁰ Now, this attitude reflects what I consider to be the instrumental attitude towards human beings. In an office, where maximum productivity is the ultimate goal, individuals are not respected for their life or their experience as human beings, but rather as means to the end of productivity or "the bottom line." Any person working for a big corporation is simply contributing to the making of money, not enriching their lives and the lives of others as unique human beings. This attitude infects every aspect of the office, especially clothing. The desired invisibility of the workplace is in itself a bad faith project, using people instrumentally and replace-ably and ignoring the dual-sided reality of human existence.

The suit significantly diminishes aspects of sexuality and embodiment for the male. It "obscures, blurs, and reduces sexuality" by ultimately de-sexualizing the male

¹³⁰ It is true that there are minor variations in style and color of suits and other workplace attire, but I argue that these minor differences still subdue the desire to express the self.

and therefore removing him from his corporeality and his facticity.¹³¹ In the article “Fashion and The Fleshly Body: Dress as Embodied Practice” in *Fashion Theory*, Joanne Entwistle writes: “By rendering ‘invisible’ the male body, the suit hides sexed characteristics, but more importantly, as the standard of dress long established, this body is normative within the public sphere, it has come to represent neutrality and disembodiment.”¹³² This move toward disembodiment once again demonstrates the desire for invisibility that defines the sadistic bad faith attitude.

In a suit, a man is approaching the kind of invisibility that a sadist craves. But with that invisibility he is walking along the treacherous edge of completely vanishing. As Benjamin Kilborne puts it in his book *Disappearing Selves: Shame and Appearance*:

Fantasies of invisibility express a wish, as well as fear, to not be seen or known. However, by putting himself beyond harm’s reach, he who relies on invisibility fantasies ipso facto isolates himself from others, ostracizes himself, and reinforces his feelings of helplessness. Whether one is no more than what one appears to be or no more than what one disappears to be, the end result is the same: isolation. Performers run great risks who rely too heavily on fantasies that they are no more than they appear.¹³³

Intended to stifle the identity and self-expression of the wearer, suits are inherently detached, restrained, and menacing.

¹³¹ Even when the suit is read or interpreted as sexually provocative or as a signifier of male “potency” I argue that such sexuality does not stem from a fully embraced sense of embodiment on the part of the male. Suits are referred to as sexy or sexual, but precisely because of the power they indicate and because of the fact that so much of the person wearing it is hidden. It is a fetishized sexuality because of the sadistic element.

¹³² Joanne Entwistle, “Fashion and The Fleshly Body: Dress as Embodied Practice,” *Fashion Theory* 4, issue 2 (2000): 323–348

¹³³ Kilborne, 45.

Conclusion: Narcissism

The desire to be the only transcendent viewpoint ironically actually results in blindness for the sadist. The ultimate voyeur is struck blind by his own inability to recognize the fundamental realities of her own existence. It is a kind of false vision rather than deceit. In sadistic bad faith, according to Sartre, “I act as if I were alone in the world... In a sense, I am reassured, I am self-confident; that is, I am in no way conscious of the fact that the Other’s look can fix my possibilities and my body.”¹³⁴

Knowing and possessing our individual selfhood has become a higher value in our world than living in and amongst others. This is where the issue of “own-ness” becomes one of narcissism. The self comes to be understood as much more about “owning” one’s individuality than feeling or knowing oneself to be part of a group. As Gilles Lipovetsky writes in his book *The Empire of Fashion*: “Fashion has not only made it possible to display one’s membership in a given rank, class, or nation, it has also been a vector of narcissistic individualization, an instrument for enlarging the aesthetic cult of the self, even at the heart of an aristocratic age.”¹³⁵

This narcissism is an extreme and disabling focus on the self to the extent to which the individual begins to lack empathy for others – and perhaps, her ability to relate to others. It is marked by a radical freedom due to a lack of responsibility to others. To be a true narcissist is to live in bad faith because one has ignored the given-ness of existence specifically in that one is always already *mitsein*, being-with-others. A narcissist is someone who thinks she is a completely transcendent freedom, although as we shall see,

¹³⁴ Sartre, 496.

¹³⁵ Lipovetsky, 29.

masochism also has narcissistic elements. As such she creates barricades that prevent others from getting too close. But these behaviors are a double-edged sword – while protecting, they are also prohibitive.

Instead of looking to seduce others, the narcissist/sadist is stuck with overwhelming desire. Her desire is to be known fully as a self, as both subject and object, but she can only manifest herself as subject. Therefore her desire is always thwarted. She also desires the other as both subject/object, but she can only experience the other as object – an object to be used, discarded, instrumentally involved in the construction of her own identity as transcendence. In fact, the more people she can judge or view strictly as objects, the more solid her own identity as subjectivity becomes. And yet her desire continues to grow. She becomes riddled with inexplicable confusion: “I am like a sleepwalker who wakens to find himself in the process of gripping the edge of the bed while he can not recall the nightmare which provoked his gesture. It is this situation which is at the origin of sadism.”¹³⁶

So, despite the sadist’s narcissistic desire to transcend the limitations of life and her own point of view, as well as transcending the possibility of having others take a point of view on her, she has in essence made herself disappear. She has become the invisible woman: “Pure subjectivity is radically individual, [narcissism] but yet, when abstracted from an empirical context, it is an empty universal.”¹³⁷ Ignoring the subjectivity of others is by implication ignoring one’s own facticity. The two go hand in hand. As Robert Ehman has put it: “I am always conscious of myself in terms of my

¹³⁶ Sartre, 517.

¹³⁷ Robert Ehman, “Subjectivity and Solipsism,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 20, 1 (1966): 3.

empirical situation and my empirical situation is the content of my life; apart from this, I would be nothing at all.”¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CLOTHING AND FREEDOM

“To shore up his ego, he needs an icon, a holy picture of his inner self. Only a faultlessly constructed mask will meet his need and his approval.”

Bernard Rudolfsky

The lie of bad faith leads to a kind of death. Indeed, to deny the freedom at the root of human existence is to deny life itself. And yet, the act of lying seems to be at the very heart of what it means to be social. As Joanne Finkelstein writes in her book *The Art of Self Invention*, sociability almost necessarily depends on deceit: “As effective social beings, we learn to lie and to identify the lies of others. Indeed in the traffic of daily life, we can count on the practice that everyone lies ... The lie is a reliable rule of sociality.”¹³⁹ But is there a way to salvage the lies that seem to be an inevitable component of social life – of which clothing is only a part?

As delineated in the previous chapters, the fact of inter-subjectivity itself seems to invite a specific kind of bad faith, manifested particularly in sadism and/or masochism. While seemingly an attempt to put others at a distance, both of these bad faith manifestations are in actuality misunderstood (or misplaced) efforts at establishing intimacy with others. Intimacy is precisely what the masochist and sadist long for, but the desire is misinterpreted. Therefore the actions they perform in order to achieve this desired closeness with others only further cement their projects of bad faith.

As we attempt to salvage a form of human interaction that may ultimately aspire

¹³⁹ Finkelstein, 2008, 71.

to be loving and free, I will analyze intimate relationships in relation to clothing.

Re-framing Dress

Let us turn to the aesthetic notion of the frame. A phenomenology of the frame describes the frame as the context, the presentation, the boundary, the curtain. The veil, or the frame, presents a point of self-enclosure. It is not a question of sincerity, but of self-possession and intention. And the frame, the veil *is* the expression of that *intent* to perform. Fashion as the veil is the curtain on the stage of sociability. Just as a literal frame serves to indicate the symbolic, aesthetic nature of the artwork as set-apart, wholly other, so the frame of fashion connotes the completion of the social package – the embodied self prepared to engage the public world as a symbol of the self. This is an explicit affirmation of the self, but the self *as* social.

In aesthetics, there is no deceit in the work of art because it is always already *framed*. The frame is what sets the work apart, removes it for viewing. It is the conceptual pedestal that establishes it as an object to be viewed *as* a work of art.¹⁴⁰ The frame creates the contextual boundaries that express the intent that this particular object is to be taken as an art object. For Georg Simmel, the boundaries of the artwork are:

that absolute ending which exercises indifference towards and defense against the exterior and a unifying integration with respect of the interior in a single act. What the frame achieves for the work of art is to symbolize and strengthen this double function of its boundary. It excludes all that surrounds it, and thus, the

¹⁴⁰ For more on how artworks need a conceptual “frame” or context in order to be appropriately understood see Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.

viewer as well, from the work of art, and thereby helps to place it at that distance from which alone it is aesthetically enjoyable.¹⁴¹

The frame both establishes and protects the boundary of the artwork – designating what is the work of art and what it is not.

Likewise, dress as a frame preserves the distinction between the self of the social world and the self that is known through narrative, in the context of a close community of others. In other words, the frame of fashion is the physical boundary between the public and private self. In this way, the metaphor of the veil will be a much more apt description than the mask, which denotes a specific form of deceit. Seeing clothing as a veil will preserve and protect distinction, boundary, context and relationship – finally securing freedom beneath the drape.

Love and Freedom

For Sartre, love represents an endless cycle of sadism and masochism, dominance and submission. The threat of bad faith makes love seem impossible, for one cannot ultimately love an object – one desires only those who are free. Yet, if the beloved is truly free, then the lover receives a love that is ultimately a choice, which raises the question of whether the beloved could have chosen, and in the future might possibly choose otherwise. This makes love a fragile relationship. Sartre sees bad faith love as an effort at possession, at capturing another's freedom. But no one can be both free and possessed. In addition, Sartre thinks that loving one person would be a limitation on one's

¹⁴¹ Simmel, Georg, "The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 11, no. 1 (February 1994): 11-17.

freedom, as restricting one's identity and options to one other individual would be a denial of freedom (bad faith). Ultimately, for Sartre, love is a seductive act (or game) intended to manipulate and dominate the Other. One forfeits one's freedom to fall in love, yet love cannot occur without one's freedom.

A poignant illustration Sartre uses is the caress. Such a symbolic gesture of love is for Sartre a reminder of transcended transcendence, bringing the Other's flesh and facticity into sharp relief. Sartre writes: "The caress is not a simple stroking; it is a shaping."¹⁴² A loving caress makes the Other aware of her body, even as the lover seeks to reshape and possess her body.

Interestingly, in contrast to Sartre's philosophical position, his personal life demonstrates quite a different perspective on love. As his letters to Simone de Beauvoir reveal, Sartre did in fact think of her as "one" with him. He writes in his *War Diaries*: "I love you with all my might, my little heart, you are me, you are my life."¹⁴³ And again: "I love you with all my heart, and we two are one."¹⁴⁴ Without the possibility of love without bad faith, it would appear that Sartre himself was, at least on this topic, an exemplification of the bad faith he denounces.

In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir sees Sartre's perspective as flawed. Since the two concepts of absolute freedom and absolute being are contraries under Sartre's philosophy, love is bound to fail. Additionally, since Sartre believes that men will always dominate women, love will always be based on inequality. Beauvoir sees that males and females can in fact come to a point of equality, in which they are both approaching the other on

¹⁴² Sartre, *BN*, 506.

¹⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir, ed. *Witness to my Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir 1926-1939* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 369.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 274.

the same terms. For Beauvoir, freedom and facticity are in a relationship of ambiguity – we are both subject and object. This ambiguity defines human beings, as well as human interactions such as love. In fact, erotic activity defines this ambiguity, since it highlights the blurred boundaries that exist between individuals in the world. Beauvoir writes: “The erotic experience is one that poignantly discloses to human beings that ambiguity of their condition; in it they are aware of themselves as flesh and spirit, as the other and as subject.”¹⁴⁵

Beauvoir continues: What D.H. Lawrence says of sexual love is generally valid: the union of two human beings is doomed to frustration *if* it is an attempt at a mutual completion which supposes an original mutilation; marriage should be a combining of two whole, independent existences, not a retreat, an annexation, a flight, a remedy....The couple should not be regarded as a unit, a closed cell; rather each individual should be integrated as such in society at large, where each (whether generosity with another individual equally adapted to the group, attachments that would be founded upon the acknowledgement that both are free (emphasis added)).¹⁴⁶

A specific kind of relational (or romantic) context provides the background for a true flourishing of human freedom. So in the end, the question of the bad faith nature of clothing becomes not one of deceit and duplicity, but instead one of how the individual knows and experiences true freedom. I contend that the sort of freedom that adequately combats bad faith is not just freedom, but freedom within a particular context. This echoes the broader existential dilemma of experiencing freedom within finitude, freedom within limitation.

Relationships that extend through time, slowly building a reciprocal and mutual narrative understanding of the self, are where the truth of an individual may be found. In light of this, one needs to discover how clothing may preserve the private realm of these

¹⁴⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 402.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 478-9.

temporally rich relationships, protecting the space and character of a context in which one is truly known. By thinking of clothing as a veil, a curtain to be drawn, or as a physical pronouncement that a performance is taking place, dress may no longer be viewed as inevitably riddled with bad faith. Against the backdrop of close, intimate relationships that remind the individual of her story, one is free to create the self.

Social Masks or Veils?

A mask is by definition worn for or before an Other. In bad faith, the mask is worn for and before the self. In both instances, it is the offering of an *imago* whose interpretation, as given for an Other, where at times that Other is even the self, makes it intrinsically social. A “social mask” is, therefore, at first redundant. If, however by the social we mean here the wider, institutional framework of society, then the social mask is another way of announcing what Maurice Natanson, building on the thought of Alfred Schutz, calls “social role.”¹⁴⁷

The idea of a social mask encompasses many related concepts, including intersubjectivity, civility and fashion. Against the contemporary rhetoric of the socially constructed, performative self, the idea of a mask may not seem contentious. However, as addressed in Chapter Four, the notion of a mask also implies disguise, deceit, and concealment – a lack of honesty that may be akin to bad faith. Must one accept the idea that clothing will always serve as a mask – a masquerade – or is there a means to remedy this inherently duplicitous nature of dress? I argue that reading dress as a veil rather than

¹⁴⁷ See Maurice Natanson. *The Journeying Self: A Study in Philosophy and Social Role*. (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1970).

as a mask allows for the conceptual space to create a contextual boundary of the presentation of the self. Viewed in this way, clothing may be seen as a component of the performed social self, yet not necessarily duplicitous or directed toward bad faith. Through preserving the boundaries between public and private, dress as veil allows for a cultivation of interpersonal relationships that are not characterized by bad faith.

Although clothing is often spoken of in reference to masquerade, or more literally referred to as a mask, I will explore what exactly it means to speak of dress as a mask of the self. Through clarifying the conceptual difference between a mask and a veil, one may see how fashion as a frame of the self serves to set boundaries of context, which then enable the self to be truly known by others – reflecting a sincere conception of human beings as fundamentally free.

Specifically, I'll use the notion of the veil as a metaphor for the ways in which we can live out our embodiment while clothed, especially in the ways we seek to know and care for others. While both masks and veils are means of counteracting a fear of exposure – the underlying fear that promotes a bad faith attitude – the veil can perhaps remedy that fear because it is moving forward into a group acknowledging that you are “something other” than what is there. The veil is specifically a protection, yet not a place to hide.¹⁴⁸

Civility itself often depends on a mask. Richard Sennett argues in his classic book *The Fall of Public Man* that “[civility is] the activity which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other’s company. Wearing a mask is the essence of civility.... Civility has as its aim the shielding of others from being burdened

¹⁴⁸ It is significant to note the distinction Sartre makes between fear and anxiety – fear is especially fear of the other and reconciling two conflicting transcendences, while anxiety deals with facing one’s own death.

with oneself.”¹⁴⁹ And yet, the idea of a veil may be a more apt metaphor for the ways in which clothing both reveals and conceals the self.

Masks seek to actively deceive. Instead of hiding the sacred, masks were used in religious rituals to enchant or appease the divine. Masks are used as a means of seduction. They are masculine and assertive. A masked individual aggressively present a new (false) truth. Masks are dependent on a performing individual presenting a new individual persona, an illusory self.

Veils similarly conceal. But they promote modesty and an attempt to protect the sacred. Veils are associated with the feminine and the intimate, and they are not dependent on an audience. An individual who is veiled is passively cloaked in anonymity.

Veils

The veil represents concealment of a very unique sort. While the act of veiling stems from a similar psychological moment as masking, one connected to shame and the desire to cover the self, veils are most often used a form of protection rather than a form of deceit. Veils are protective rather than performative.

One of the primary reasons for the institution of veiling in certain religious societies is modesty, a notion deeply connected to the idea of protecting something sacred. In chapter four of *The Psychology of Clothes*, Flugel turns to the issue of

¹⁴⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W.W.Norton and Company, 1992) 264 (and ff).

modesty. I will not restate his complex method of breaking down modesty, but fundamentally, he claims that modesty serves to avoid the “arousal of two distinct and opposite emotions in other people: arousal and disgust.”¹⁵⁰ Arousal and disgust are connected to the two fundamental uses of the body – seduction and death – both of which are connected to bad faith as outlined previously.

Masks are used to *disguise* while veils are used to *conceal*. Veils conceal something that isn't seen, but the veil itself is the only substitute. The device is nothing but a means of concealing. The fact of concealment is always understood. Whereas a mask hides in order to present a different or false façade – one that is intended as a substitute reality. Masks that are well crafted may never even reveal the fact that it is a mask, while the awareness of the concealing veil is ever-present.

Both masks and veils are associated with death and religious rituals – the spiritual, the sacred, and the symbolic. But again, veils are used to conceal and/or protect the sacred, while masks are incorporated to engage the sacred or divine. Additionally, these connections are significant in that the intimate and the sacred are both means of placating or alleviating anxiety concerning death.

Masks disguise, transform, or display identity while a veil protects identity, thereby instilling the distinction between public and private spaces. To acknowledge dress as a veil is to acknowledge that there exists a place where the self is fully known, fully revealed and that whatever garments are there are not the complete individual on display but an instance that is ever so slightly revealed.

These issues concerning masks and veils touch the distinction between public and private, the publicly performed self and the self of private and intimate relationships. It is

¹⁵⁰ Flugel, 62.

commonplace today to speak of the socially constructed self. And indeed, in many ways an individual is nothing beyond the self that is projected (or performed) in public. Yet, there is still a sense in which the self of the public arena – in an atmosphere of strangers – is different and unique from the self that is shared with lovers and close intimate friends and companions. This is the distinction addressed by Erving Goffman in his seminal work of sociology *The Performance of the Self in Everyday Life*. While Goffman argues that even in the most intimate of situations one is still “performing” a self, I disagree. It seems more that (perhaps only in rare cases) there exists the possibility of a self which isn't a performance – which is revealed in a genuine sense of honesty and vulnerability before those upon whom one has placed a great deal of trust.

Examples of Veils

Take, for instance, the wedding veil: historically, brides have worn a veil before and especially during the wedding ceremony. As the ceremony draws to a close and the couple is pronounced “man and wife,” the groom lifts the veil to kiss his bride. In this particular case, the veil represents the fact that the bride is set apart for her husband. The veil becomes a symbol of their intimacy, their new state of unity. Before they were officially married, “knowing” her face was metaphorically off limits to the groom. But now, after the wedding, she is to be known in full in the particular context of their

marriage. In many cases the veil also represents purity and virginity – two much desired traits for a bride-to-be.

Likewise, the *hajib*, the traditional head covering for Islamic women, indicates that a woman is to be “known,” or seen, only by her husband. She is not to be objectified by the gaze of other men, but only seen by her husband, who presumably knows her as a subject as well as an object.

In a very general sense, veils are often worn as a protection. In the case of many Middle Eastern women, they are worn to protect against sun and sand, and the veils are then removed in the privacy and safety of one’s home. The veil is a protection against a hostile environment – whether extreme cold, extreme heat, or perhaps the metaphoric hostility of an unwanted gaze.

In all of these cases, veils serve as signs that designate a division between public and private – when and where women are to be fully known. A bride is not to be “known” before her marriage, and a Muslim woman is not to be “known” in public, while functioning in the marketplace. In both instances, the women are known fully in the context of relationships – contexts of trust and security where their objectivity is not to be exploited. In both instances the veil itself is the symbol that designates whether or not the woman is in a place where she will be fully known. A veiled woman, then, is not one who is presenting a false self or lying about who she is; she simply isn’t fully disclosing her identity. In the same way, when extending the concept to clothing, one should understand that clothing does not present a self of deceit but rather a self who is only partially disclosed.

Trust, Civilization, and Manners: Clothing in the Public Sphere

But how is trust bred? Is it possible to generate trust in civilized society? There must be a context; it is simply inevitable. The fashion industry is just one context. Manners are an indispensable tool of socialization. Manners create the basis – the horizon of significance – against which all expressions, gestures, garments make sense. Manners are also subjective, dependent on a specific group. According to Dallett Hemphill, manners serve three social functions. One purpose is to "constitute a subtle but pervasive system of social regulation or control."¹⁵¹ Another more creative function is to "generate the feelings that help people assume their social roles," while a third is to clue us in "about our place in the social order."¹⁵² Consequently, "these meaning-laden acts and gestures are the signal flags of an encounter, by which we communicate, often nonverbally, who we are and what we expect of each other."¹⁵³ Ultimately, according to Richard Sennett, manners are rules for proper social conduct, "manners developed as a result of a shared ethics and moral code."¹⁵⁴

In many ways, the institution of manners was a part of preserving a code of decorum for public and/or formal spaces. While manners in some way "hide" or contain identity, they also allow for a public identity, the taking on of certain roles that allow a

¹⁵¹ Dallett Hemphill. *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Sennett, 15..

different kind of individual identity to flourish. Richard Sennett has written that manners and rituals of politeness create a “mask of self” that is necessary in public exchange. But Sennett argues that such a mask is not a bad thing: “I wonder if this contempt for ritual masks of sociability has not really made us more primitive culturally than the simplest tribe of hunters and gatherers.”¹⁵⁵ Offering a counter-argument to the contemporary idea that one should display the “genuine” self at all times, Sennett argues that civilization itself depends on the cultivation of specific roles, dictated by manners and systems or codes of politeness. His argument is significant in that by extension one may argue that the “mask” of fashion is necessary in the public sphere. People require clothing, and by adopting certain trends or styles of dress, one may actually be providing the means for a different sort of public interaction. In addition, by bracketing off the public domain as a place in which one does adopt certain prescribed behaviors and socially uniform modes of dress, the intimate sphere of interaction becomes all the more valuable.¹⁵⁶

If the sort of social roles lived out through codes of dress and behavior become an act of preservation rather than deceit, it may be clear that what is really at work is clothing serving a veil rather than a mask. A mask attempts to combat the fear of exposure yet it doesn’t institute the division between the public and private realms. This is why the veil serves as a more effective, perhaps more sincere way of understanding this desire. A veil protects, working against exposure, yet it acknowledges a separate space for public and private – the mundane and the sacred. It preserves the concept, and the actual space, of a private, sacred form of knowing (the other).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ The argument has often been made that in our contemporary society in which everyone craves intimacy in all places at all times, genuine intimacy has all but disappeared. I’m thinking most specifically of arguments related to the use of social media, the internet, etc.

In seeking to be known in a world of others what many individuals crave is to be exposed while still being accepted. There is, in addition to the masochistic dimensions of this wish, the quest for intimacy.

Consumerism and Intimacy: Finding Love

With the fashion industry often cited as the largest jewel in the crown of the Western consumerist paradigm, clothing has come to play a very significant role in the perpetuation of a specific kind of materialism-focused bad faith. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman describes a “Society of Consumers” as being “distinguished by a remaking of inter-human relations on the pattern, and in the likeness, of the relations between consumers and the objects of their consumption.”¹⁵⁷ This consumer, or instrumental, based understanding of human relationships directly connects to the ways in which we perform the self or rather use the self to form bridges to others.¹⁵⁸

What's so important about regaining a sense of intimacy in connection with fashion? What does that have to do with sincerity and a remedy for bad faith? Intimacy, true intimacy, is based on love – the precise opposite of a bad faith attitude. In order to love others genuinely, one must fully know and love oneself first. Secondly, one must be able to love another simply and completely for who s/he is – without conditions and

¹⁵⁷ Zygmunt Bauman. *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 11.

¹⁵⁸ “The ever more common pattern of a ‘pure relationship,’ revealed and described by Anthony Giddens in his *Transformations of Intimacy*, may be interpreted as a transplantation of that commodity-market rule to the realm of human bonds.” Bauman, *Consuming Life*, p. 21. Additionally, many branding companies have begun to use the idea of love as an actual tactic to entice consumers to purchase goods. For example, Saatchi and Saatchi CEO Kevin Roberts proposes the idea of “lovemarks” as a new and more powerful version of trademarks. Consumers will literally buy items because they are in love with them (or believe the products have the power to bring them love.) See *Lovemarks* by Kevin Roberts for more.

without a view towards selfish or instrumental aims. The goal is to love another through mutual trust and affection.

Intimacy is fostered when one is vulnerable, trusting, treated as both an embodied object of desire and a unique individual subjectivity. Intimacy is experienced when one is *known*, acknowledged, accepted, embraced – both in body and spirit. Intimacy and love may best be understood in contrast to seduction. Although it would be incorrect to argue that love never includes desire, it seems fair to say that love enables one to seek the elimination of desire. Seduction is a game based on the unknown, the un-predictable; desire then becomes the yearning to know what is unknown. In contrast, love is trust, based on genuine knowledge of the other.¹⁵⁹

Especially relevant to my argument is the fact that seduction is often seen as a form of mastery, in a sadistic sense. To seduce another means to control their perception – control what they know, how information is revealed, to craft a perfect kind of instrumental-based union. This mastery, or attempt at mastery, is another manifestation of bad faith. For to attempt such mastery over another, and certainly over the perceptions of another, is ultimately an effort to deny the limitations of human finitude.

In addition, seduction is based entirely on the appearance of desire rather than the possibility of true desire. Seduction is inherently selfish, focused exclusively on what feelings are expressed (whether true or not) rather than on the feelings produced. It is fundamentally more about the “I” than the other. Because seduction then depends on a certain kind of secrecy, the seducer always fears exposure.

¹⁵⁹ Without entering an epistemological debate regarding the degree to which we may ever truly “know” another, for the sake of my argument, it should be sufficient to present love as a kind of knowledge of another in contrast to the false masks and incomplete selves I’ve been discussing throughout.

As Kenneth Gergen writes: “As one acquires the trappings of the form, one’s actions lose the sense of spontaneity and sincerity. One’s actions become a metaphor for the myriad exposures that have gone before, a continuation of the grand and glorious game, more like performances of commitment than commitment itself.”¹⁶⁰ When immersed in a game of seduction, the possibility of ever truly loving the object of desire seems impossible to comprehend.

This form of seduction demands a multitude of selves, each one prepared to perform for the sake of the seductive game. In the kind of duplication of the self that is a part of seduction, the self-focused, narcissistic impulse seeks to clone the self as many times as possible. This creation of a “monstrous double” leads to the death of self instead of a protection of the self. The mythic horror of discovering one’s own double is exemplified in this scenario – once one has been duplicated, made replaceable, so to speak, one is no longer needed. So death becomes imminent. Baudrillard writes: “To seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion. It is to be taken in by one’s own illusion and move in an enchanted world.”¹⁶¹

On the other hand, true intimacy can offer a life of knowledge and understanding of the self that is unique in human experience. Anthony Giddens writes in *The Transformation of Intimacy*: “Intimacy is above all a matter of emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality.”¹⁶²

In addition to equality, vulnerability, and emotional intimacy, love must involve trust. To finally allow the self to become exposed while still expecting to be accepted

¹⁶⁰ Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. US: Basic Books, 1991), 224.

¹⁶¹ Baudrillard, 69.

¹⁶² Anthony Giddens. *Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 30.

requires an enormous amount of trust. This kind of trust directly opposes the sort of deceit involved in bad faith clothing projects, where an individual constructs a false and incomplete version of the self. Giddens continues: “Both accountability and authority – where it exists – in pure relationships are deeply bound up with trust. Trust without accountability is likely to become one-sided, that is, to slide into dependence; accountability without trust is impossible because it would mean the continual scrutiny of the motives and actions of the other.”¹⁶³ Ultimately, trust is protective. Trust is what protects the secrets revealed. This is the same kind of protection that the veil provides.

In normal everyday interactions on the street, we may not care if the people we encounter are performing or consistent. It may not affect us if they are engaged in a bad faith project. And yet, as an individual makes a transition from stranger to confidant, the importance of their trustworthiness dramatically increases. (Even in cases of basic social mobility, we may frequently suspect an individual’s motives or worthiness to change status or group affiliation. What are their reasons? Are they qualified? Are they *sincere*?)

“We value a certain constancy in self not only in ourselves but in the people we meet, and we want that self to be real or true and not just a façade designed to con us,” Robert Weber writes in *The Created Self*. “When another person shifts characteristics quickly, or takes on a false identity, the effect on us is substantial.”¹⁶⁴ The consequences of this kind of deceit are the most severe in the case of intimate relationships. Weber continues to explain that through “the process [of deceit] your tormentor will have destroyed some of your most ingrained assumptions about trust, belief in your own

¹⁶³ Ibid, 191.

¹⁶⁴ Weber, *The Created Self*, 111.

judgment, and the delicate membrane of human identity that both separates and connects you to others.”¹⁶⁵

Self-Narrative/Collective Memory

This kind of intimacy is key to the formation of the self in that only under the gaze of the other do one come to know the self, as I discussed in Chapter Two. In intimate relationships, memory plays a key role. It is not only under the gaze of the other that one knows the self as an object to be viewed, but one also begins to know the actions, the narrative, of that embodied, lived self as others confirm the narrative. It is under this collective memory that self is created in freedom. A shared life and a shared narrative equals responsibility and accountability. When others surround an individual in a particular context – the context of a family for instance – the individual is held to standards of her own behavioral norms. The people with whom one has a shared history see the self unfold in narrative, and therefore begin to truly know a person through his/her actions.

In order to understand the value of narrative in the context of relationships the notion of the narrative self must be further explained. The individual bestows meaning on the seemingly random events of one’s life, through the creation, and telling, of one’s personal narrative. Although theorists have examined the question of personal identity over the centuries, recently various thinkers have begun to equate the self with the notion of narrative – in the literal sense of a story or a script. They ask: If the self is ultimately nothing more than a social construct, then how is it constructed? Well, it is created

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 113.

through a cluster of actions, centered around the specific body or specific self in question. And if one is to make sense of this set of seemingly arbitrary actions, then the actions must be coordinated into a narrative. This narrative becomes the way in which human beings make sense or create sense out of life. So, it is accepted that the self is narrative, found in the unfolding of the stories concerning its own action. Narrative contributes to a sense of orientation and purpose. “The storied nature of our experience is... what holds the past (memory) and future (anticipation) together in the present, creating the more or less unified sense we have of our ongoing lives.”¹⁶⁶

The narrative notion of the self is the latest in a long legacy of philosophical efforts to define selfhood. It represents the most contemporary understanding of self and personal identity and as such it encompasses some of the most significant aspects of how we understand a self to operate. Namely, a self is constructed through action, unfolding in time, against a backdrop of social interaction. This social interaction manifests itself in several important ways, but most significantly, the social milieu in which a self operates determines the language the narrator must use. There are certain norms and/or social cues that serve as givens, even as an individual attempts to construct, or write, his/her own narrative. Additionally, the social background brings in the notion of performance and audience to the unfolding action of the self-narrative. The action is only meaningful in interaction with others. (This performative aspect of the self has prompted theorists such as Erving Goffman to write that the self is always performing, always aware of its audience.) But however one looks at it, it is true that the action of the self-narrative unfolds something like the script of a play where the individual is the star.

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Paul Kerby, *Narrative and the Self* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 8.

In *Narrative and the Self*, Anthony Paul Kerby gives an explanation of the notion of a narrative self, beginning with the premise that language is the most formative aspect of reality and that converting experience into language is the only way one may be able to make sense of one's life. Storytelling, or the formation of narrative, then becomes the only way that one may overlay meaning onto otherwise incoherent and senseless series of actions. In this process of narration, one's individual history is given meaning. Not only does one's history become meaningful as part of the self-narrative, but one's life then become a sort of narrative project, extending out towards the future.

Paul Ricoeur explains: "Our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories that we tell about ourselves. It makes very little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with an identity."¹⁶⁷ Anthony Giddens elaborates:

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. ... [cannot be wholly fictive] It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.¹⁶⁸

Judith Butler builds upon this idea by telling us that "we become reflective upon ourselves... through fear and terror" when questioned by an accusatory "other." She writes that "only in the face of such a query or attribution from an other – 'was it you?' – do any of us start to narrate ourselves, or find that, for urgent reasons, we much become self-narrating beings."¹⁶⁹ This attempt to avoid punishment causes a person to explain

¹⁶⁷ Kerby, 41, from Ricoeur, "History as Narrative and Practice"

¹⁶⁸ Giddens 1991, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 11.

where she was and what she was doing as a way of avoiding guilt and blame. So, in this sense, confession and narrative have the same birthplace. One must explain the causal link between actions, either in order to own up to some kind of harm or to avoid guilt. Butler elaborates, "...in fearful response, I offer myself as an 'I' and try to reconstruct my deeds, showing that the deed attributed to me was or was not, in fact, among them. I am either owning up to myself as the cause of such an action... or defending myself against the attribution... These are the parameters within which my account of myself takes place."¹⁷⁰

In this sense, narrative is at first a response, in dialogue with another. The self is already a communicating, linguistically oriented being. However, the language that must be used is already given. Butler also explains that the narrative of the self is always directed to another. It is an action that assumes an audience.

To tell the story of oneself is already to act, since telling is a kind of action, performed with some addressee, generalized or specific, an implied feature. It is an action in the direction of another, as well as an action that requires an other, in which an other is presupposed. The other is thus within the action of my telling.¹⁷¹

Part of this already existing audience is an implied pre-existing language; the narrative itself must be told in a language one didn't choose. Additionally, we begin to adopt and play pre-existing roles and characters in our narrative. Similar to the act of saying "I love you," where a person thinks she is having an unique experience, but instead she is really only re-enacting proscribed social agendas and scripts. One has to submit to norms of recognition, as they exist in the given social and linguistic

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 81, 82.

environment. Butler elaborates: “There is no ‘I’ that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no ‘I’ that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning. The ‘I’ does not stand apart from the prevailing matrix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks.”¹⁷² Individuals are always involved in a struggle with society and social norms: “In an important sense, this [social] matrix is also the condition for the emergence of the ‘I’.”¹⁷³ The necessity of social norms and social interactions is essential to my argument concerning fashion as a significant aspect of the self.¹⁷⁴

In fact the very idea of romantic love introduces a narrative into a person’s life. Individuals tell their own love stories, an integral component of romance. The idea of romance is connected to the idea of finding the self in freedom. But the relational context is not to be overlooked. For many, finding love or discovering love is equal to freedom and self-realization.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Ibid, 6.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Fashion is an area in which we may invent ourselves. If a narrative theory of the self is to be accepted, then it only makes sense that the physical aspects of fashion are the appropriate accompaniment to the invention of the self (as we become characters in our own narrative). Two recent books that very clearly illustrate how personal narratives relate to fashion in this temporally situated way: *Autobiography of a Wardrobe* (NY: Pantheon, 2008) by Elizabeth Kendall and *Target Underwear and a Vera Wang Gown: Notes from a Single Girl’s Closet* (NY: Gotham, 2006) by Adena Halpern. Not only do these books represent a somewhat clever way to write a memoir, but I believe they demonstrate what many women and men experience – namely, that the clothing of our lives can serve as signposts for memories – triggers and reminders of certain experiences. The clothing becomes props or costumes for life’s unfolding scenes.

¹⁷⁵ Giddens, 1993.

Counterarguments

This view of love as freedom and self-realization is contested in our contemporary social milieu. Zygmunt Bauman writes of how the context of relationships is in fact misinterpreted as particularly stifling of individual human freedom:

[I]t is this frailty (the “running self”) and apparently easy disposability of individual identities and inter-human bonds that are represented in contemporary culture as the substance of individual freedom. One choice that such freedom would neither recognize, nor grant, nor allow is the resolve (or indeed the ability) to persevere in holding to the identity already constructed, that in the kind of activity which also presumes, and necessarily entails, the preservation and security of the social network on which that identity rests while it actively reproduces it.¹⁷⁶

In a basic physical sense, clothing is always concealing, “covering” up the nakedness of the body or the “truth” of a person’s embodiment. That aspect of deceit is unavoidable. Yet not everyone who wears clothes or engages in the fashion industry is engaged in a bad faith project. It really all boils down to a question of intention. But is there a way that one's intention is visually readable?

Perhaps most basically, clothing can communicate the kind of job we do – in society, for society. But the modern world has become so lost with this idea of displaying “the self” – some kind of deep psychological truth about one’s self, the cult of the individual, or the Romantic notion of being able to reveal the “soul” to another – that the truth of what fashion really can accomplish has been lost. Clothing really can reveal

¹⁷⁶ Bauman, 106.

status, class, and occupation – all socially defined points of differentiation. And within those defined roles, individuals can find the space to reveal themselves beneath the clothes – in the context of relationship. Instead, people desire to reveal the self to no one, no audience – just screaming: “I want to be known.” The narcissistic self is constantly on display, and yet no one really knows it. The concept of relationship is lost; the relating is the key.

**CHAPTER SIX:
AGAINST FASHION**

“Those who make their dress a principal part of themselves, will, in general, become of no more value than their dress.”

William Hazlitt

“We keep secret from ourselves a truth we cannot face.” The secret of death is unbearable. Freedom throws us into anguish. Freedom is too great to face. People would much prefer to think that their choices are actually limited, even if against their own will. In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz recalls an experiment where customers of a grocery store encounter a display selling various jars of jam. Many more individuals actually purchased the products when the display only featured three jams for purchase versus a display with five or more similar jellies.¹⁷⁷ When faced with overwhelming choice, people become paralyzed, unable to make a decision at all. Instead they refrain from the decision altogether.

Perhaps it is the fact that everyone knows the truth of human freedom, but in the overwhelming paralysis of defining and choosing a life for one self, most prefer to play victim to the circumstances presumably “chosen” for them. One chooses to relinquish the ability to choose. But is that a valid choice? Existentially, for Sartre, not at all. It is denying the very basis of human experience. The human condition is nothing if not defined by freedom of choice. We are condemned to be free.

It is not that all clothed individuals per se are guilty of bad faith. I am using Sartre to point out an incongruity in the way we talk about clothing, showing the particularity of

¹⁷⁷ Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (NY: HarperPerennial, 2005).

the ways in which we wear the body, or the self, in reference to clothing. Bad faith convicts those who view fashion or clothing as capable of transforming, or making over, the self, or those who look to clothing as a place to uniquely act out their freedom.

One possible solution to these manifestations of bad faith lies in realizing the irreplaceability of others. Whether immersed in social life or running from it, the person in bad faith does not recognize each human being as uniquely irreplaceable. Awareness of human irreplaceability is one way to salvage a relationship with clothing that incorporates human freedom and intersubjectivity and does not deny the foundation of human existence. The phenomenon of fashion trends is a precise example of how dress can serve to make a human being easily replaceable. If every young girl is dressing alike, in matching leggings, boots, with straightened hair, then each one of them is of as much value as the next. Their style of dress in no way distinguishes them as unique in their individuality, but rather it reveals them as simply one of a crowd.

Under the Sartrean rubric, however, one could rescue the idea of clothing and/or fashion by viewing it as an outworking of play. Through adopting a playful attitude towards dress – a perspective that neither depends on dress as expressing an (non-existent) inner self nor denigrates or excessively elevates others relative to the self – one may come to see and appreciate the simple aesthetic and stylistic pleasures of dress. In order to play, in freedom, one must have bounds. Know the code before transgressing the code. Play is being an instrument in the community, serving a certain role, but not being seen as an instrument or seeing others as instruments.

In this dissertation I in no way intend to suggest that one may not possess this simple approach to clothing. Surely not everyone who dresses for the day is engaged in a

bad faith project. It should be noted that I am not making normative claims though these arguments, just showing how these manifestations are revealed in these certain cases.

But I find another way to salvage the idea of fashion. Under the rubric discussed in Chapter Four, one may think of clothing as a veil, a barrier that protects the intimate spaces of the self and as such perpetuates and preserves a narrative conception of the self. Although Sartre rejects the notion that one's past should have any effect on the present decisions an individual makes, I see this approach to clothing as one that uniquely solves the specific dilemmas of relationship that the sadistic and masochistic manifestations of bad faith evoke.

Choices in narrative and choices in fashion both require embodiment in a particular way. In the moment of choice, the mind is most closely wed to the body as the body enacts what the mind has decided. Both aspects of the self converge as an individual prepares for action. Fashion especially demonstrates embodiment because of its literal dependence on the body. In dressing, one is made uniquely aware of the body as one seeks to reveal and conceal various parts of it. Fashion is a performance of the body – it highlights the body, showcases it. In being allowed to relish the body in this way, one comes to know and appreciate embodiment in a peculiar way. A fashioned body allows one to know one self and interact with others in ways one wouldn't (or couldn't) otherwise.

Closely related to the idea of embodiment is the subject/object duality of the self. Fashion most certainly highlights this dual nature of the individual, and through drawing attention to it, I argue that it allows us to come to an acceptance of it. Maybe while it is true that no one can “opt out” and just become nothing but an object (like the women

who purchase and wear haute couture clothing just for the sake of being seen), no one can completely by-pass objectivity. Embodiment demands that one is an object to others, just as they are objects in return. So, in a unified account of the self, one would be forced to accept both the inherent subjectivity – which requires the acceptance of responsibility and self-reflexivity in choice – as well as objectivity – which acknowledges that one is situated and embodied in ways one did not choose. This outer casing informs our very experiences of the world in ways that cannot be overlooked and ignored. In some way or another, each person has to make peace with that dual nature of the self. Fashion is one area that helps deliver that peace. When one dresses with an awareness of others, one is acknowledging that she is an embodied object, vulnerable to the gaze of others, but also screaming individuality. One’s fashion, or style, announces to the world: “I am an individual, unique subject! Recognize it!” The act of dressing is one of the few human experiences where these two dualities converge in this way.

In a narrative construction of the self, the individual may be understood as an actor who is fully embodied and ultimately fashioned (or costumed).¹⁷⁸ This embodiment allows the self to know its own particularity and uniqueness in subjectivity, yet also encounter its own objective nature, because as a costumed character, she must be aware of the “gaze” of others. This leads to my final point – a world of others. The others that surround a person are the audience for her narrative, but they are also participants in the story. In a more significant way, they are the “others” that she longs to relate to, and who perhaps dictate the choices and actions she makes. As we create a self through narrative,

¹⁷⁸ For more on this, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (NY: Anchor, 1959).

it is always a self in reference, and in contrast to, others. These “others” very much determine the kind of story or script an individual may write.

In addition, just as a narrative is constructed through language that exists before us, the others around a person gives her the sartorial vocabulary to create the fashioned self. One always mirrors those around, whether in word, dress, or behavior. One becomes a member through empathy and imitation, and ultimately through remembering. Memory, and its physical manifestation in fashion is what enables us to be a self amidst – and connected to – others. Memory, then, is the concept that ties narrative to choice to embodiment to society and back to clothing. It is the idea of memory, and the way it is manifested in one’s life, actions, and clothing that brings the argument full circle. One can live a fashionable life and still maintain a connection to the past and an orientation toward the future.

Fashion contributes to a meaningful life primarily because it helps one to know oneself as an individual through the construction of self-narrative. In addition, the fashioned, narrative self enriches one’s self conception in several other ways: it forces one to encounter the freedom to choose, experimenting with making self-determining choices; it causes one to become uniquely aware of embodiment as one becomes a costumed character or a dressed and fashioned body (as such one is aware of oneself as a self-defining subject, yet an object exposed to the gaze of others); and it forces one to know oneself in a given social context – always, already with others. There are given languages and given roles that are used to create a narrative (a self) that makes sense to an audience of others.

Lars Svendsen's Argument Against Fashion

In conclusion, I'd like to address the work of Lars Svendsen, whose recent book *Fashion: A Philosophy* attempts to dismiss the pursuit of fashion as frivolous and transitory. Svendsen offers an analysis of fashion in which fashion detracts from the self, representative of a cultural dilemma concerning selfhood. Although many of Lars Svendsen's conclusions appear to agree with my own, I don't advocate a total dismissal of fashion in the way he does. As the bad faith attitude defines a phenomenological project, an existential state of mind, it is not something immediately apparent on the surface. It is not easily read through one's actions. I acknowledge that bad faith may be more a state of intention. Adding this level of nuance to Svendsen's analysis may allow for a picture in which fashion isn't completely tossed out, but where one is willing to recognize the variety of relationships individuals may have towards clothing, whether fashionable or not.

Svendsen's primary goal in writing his book is to address the relationship between fashion and the formulation of identity. He recognizes that understanding fashion is perhaps a "universal key" for understanding the modern world, admitting that in some way or another, we are all "citizens of the world of fashion."¹⁷⁹ Although in *Fashion: A Philosophy* Svendsen acknowledges that the subject of fashion is valuable and worth scholarly consideration, in the end he dismisses fashion as explicitly superficial.

Throughout the book, he argues that fashion expresses a person's individuality, yet the individuality that is ultimately expressed is empty. He accepts that clothing is "a vital part of the social construction of the self," "expressing one's individuality," and "the

¹⁷⁹ Lars Svendsen, *Fashion: A Philosophy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 20.

formulation of identity.”¹⁸⁰ But yet, he sees the self that evolves out of fashion as transitory and fleeting. Paradoxically, the pursuit of identity has led to the dissolution of identity. Svendsen argues that by our processes of consumption, we literally buy a lifestyle through the tangible objects that reflect how we want to be. However, these objects (clothing particularly), and the brands they represent, begin to dominate us, resulting in our consumption of those symbols rather than meaningful items they represent.

If fashion could be primarily symbolic, indicating truths about the individual wearing it, then there could be some actual value in fashion. But Svendsen argues that clothes are in no way so easily readable: “Most clothes communicate so little that even a large wardrobe will not communicate all that much, so it is doubtful that the average slave of fashion should be ascribed any greater visual ability to communicate than, for example, a person who only had a few items of clothing, but who indicates a distinct subcultural affiliation.”¹⁸¹

Perhaps clothes do communicate *something*, he admits, but what? There is no clearly identifiable message. For Svendsen, “clothes are semantically unstable because the meaning is directly related to context.”¹⁸² Additionally, items lose meaning as fashions fade. Fashion, by definition, is time-sensitive. Therefore, “strictly speaking, clothes are *not* a language. Not everything that communicates ought to be called a language,” Svendsen writes. “Clothes are closer to music and visual art than to normal

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 65.

¹⁸² Ibid, 71.

language.”¹⁸³ In addition, clothing is merely self-referential, prohibiting a reference to anything outside of itself.

Svendsen moves on to address the relation between fashion and the body, which is most relevant to my concerns dealing with bad faith. “We seek identity in the body, and clothes are an immediate continuation of the body,” he writes. “That is also why clothes are so important to us: they are the closest to our body.”¹⁸⁴ The body and clothing have always been in dialogue with each other – one has to fit the shape of the other. “Clothes rewrite the body” – whether clothed or naked, the body is always in reference to, and dependent on, clothing. So, for Svendsen, our collective obsession with clothing has contributed to a detrimental focus on the body as plastic and malleable. If we begin to view the body as we do clothing – as something that is easily taken on and off – then we have lost a sense of the “natural” as even our bodies are shaped and fashioned in the quest of some arbitrary ideal of beauty. In some ways, we have lost the ability to determine what a natural, naked body is in contrast to a clothed, fashioned body. This is yet another negative effect of fashion.

In Chapter Seven, Svendsen gets down to his primary concern: “the symbolic dimension of consumption and the role this symbolic consumption allegedly plays in the formation of people’s identity.”¹⁸⁵ He argues that we do not consume because we want to be conformists, but rather to stand out. It is possible, as Michel de Certeau and Georg Simmel have argued, that consumption is a creative process, a meaningful field of self-cultivation, yet Svendsen sees that objects of consumption begin to detach themselves from the subjects of their creation and begin to follow their own logic. This is what leads

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 77.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 113.

to the impersonal dominance of commodities. Ironically, we begin to seek objects and brands that are more and more abstract to create ourselves as specific individuals. Therefore, “to put on a fashion item is to be a walking paradox, since at the same time one embraces and expresses both individualism and conformity.”¹⁸⁶ At this point, we are most definitely buying the “idea” of a product or an object rather than the object itself. But this may have always been the case. All commodities have a cultural component and “it is the ‘cultural’ not the ‘material’ aspect of commodities that is for sale.”¹⁸⁷ So consumption, as Baudrillard wrote, is the consumption of symbolic signs. However, “if one’s identity is directly linked to the things that surround one, or rather to the things’ symbolic value, this identity will be just as transient as those symbolic values.”¹⁸⁸ But, what do these symbols *mean*? (“The power to represent is dependent on a commodity’s inner insignificance.”) “We seek identity and shop symbolic values, knowing full well that they never last. To counteract this lack of duration we are constantly searching for something new.”¹⁸⁹ This “replaceability” element is at root very troubling, and fundamentally irrational. Thus, a “consumer society presupposes irrational individuals.”¹⁹⁰

In conclusion, Svendsen wants to point out that the modern person has the new responsibility to become a authentic individual. We are “hyperactive lifestyle constructors.” Individualism has a grip on us that is literally choking us. For us, the self has become something that must be “created, monitored, maintained and changed.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 120.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 122.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 126.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 130.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 131.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 140.

“We must choose a lifestyle and, as a style, the choice is basically an *aesthetic* one.”¹⁹² Aesthetics then “becomes a centre for the formation of identity.” Fashion just helps us bypass our autonomy in the process: “The fashion industry took upon itself the mission of saving us the hard work of having to create ourselves as a work of art by enabling us instead to buy a readymade package from a fashion house.”¹⁹³

Finally, Svendsen wants to say that the self and the clothes on the self are related, but not mutually dependent.¹⁹⁴ He makes a larger statement about how clothes do not express an inner self and they do not create a self through the process of being worn, a point that I certainly agree with, but I don’t think he addresses it sufficiently.

Ultimately, Svendsen concludes that fashion as an industry is in economic decline and aesthetically uninteresting. The heyday of clothes fashion has passed. Because of the “logic of supplementation” everything counts as fashion. But what characterizes today’s fashions is a strong stylistic pluralism. And this pluralism does not make us any freer. It reveals truths to us about our lives and our society, “but what truths are these? That we cultivate surfaces, that we live in an increasingly fictionalized reality, that the constancy of our identities is steadily declining.”¹⁹⁵ Perhaps fashion reveals the truths it explicitly helped to create.

¹⁹² Ibid, 141.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 142.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 151.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 157.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

“You are entirely up to you. Make your body.
Make your life. Make yourself.” *Nike ad*

While I have made an effort here to elucidate the kinds of actions and the kinds of relationships to clothing that might reflect a bad faith attitude, I also recognize that ultimately bad faith is a matter of *intention*. It seems to me, then, that one might be a fashionable individual who has not fully embodied the bad faith attitude towards dress. I hope I have successfully outlined the ways in which the fashion industry does in fact perpetuate an attitude towards clothing that views the body as armor, as an outward shell that may be fit into the Procrustean bed of “fashion,” although that may not necessarily always be the case.

As fashionable clothing infiltrates almost all clothing retailers – and as the notion of “fashion” becomes broader and more all encompassing, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to step outside of the “The Empire of Fashion” and just simply wear stylish clothing or even neutral garments. But if clothing, whatever it may be, is worn with an acknowledgement of the veil, it seems it may not indicate a bad faith attitude.

Epilogue: Sustainability: A Practical Antidote to Bad Faith

As a concluding note, it seems worth addressing the increasing interest in sustainability in fashion. It is appropriate that while examining the ways in which clothing may enable us to seek more lasting, loving bonds with others, through cultivating sincere and vulnerable connections, we turn briefly to look at the potential benefits of a sustainable model for the global apparel industry.

Sustainability, at its most fundamental, is about restoring connection – to others and to the earth; and to many of the limited, and limiting, contexts in which human beings find themselves. These kinds of connections between mind and body, self and other, human and environment, are about overcoming bad faith – not ignoring the fact that each person’s actions entails certain consequences which may affect others.

At the very heart of the sustainability issue in fashion is the question the function of clothing. This question has also been lurking beneath many of the previous discussions in this paper, primarily because this is where the practical use of fashion meets a theoretical and definitional concern. Sustainability calls theorists to examine the purposes and premises of a certain industry while suggesting practical methods to implement that will preserve the essential mechanisms of the particular endeavor. Sustainability seeks to further a respect of the world around us while maintaining specific business functions.

Concerns over sustainable practices have been especially slow to reach the fashion industry. Perhaps this is due to the paradoxical notion of sustainable fashion. How could an industry designed to make objects necessarily obsolete, a business invested in constant change and speed of manufacturing, be concerned with slow creation,

thoughtful and cautious use, and attentive consumer use and post-use practices? How could such an enterprise hope to become sustainable? And yet, the mumblings over how to make the clothing industry more sustainable are finally growing louder.

The question of fashion and sustainability is a huge one, as many have argued that the very concepts themselves really are mutually exclusive. In addition, there is so much confusion regarding what one is actually talking about when speaking of sustainable fashion – Using organic fibers? Simply incorporating fair trade? Cruelty-free practices? Or are people concerned with creating garments which are themselves meant to be sustainable, reusable, lasting the test of time? Here's where the conceptual dilemma gets tricky – isn't fashion by definition an endeavor that is designed to change, to chase novelty, to constantly present something new? For many, yes. The seasonal shows, the constant cycle of trends are only a small part of a picture so dependent on change itself.

If facing the question of sustainability prompts an examination of the very concept of fashion, I believe the proceeding pages can offer much clarification of what exactly fashion is. In examining fashion against the background of Sartre's concept of bad faith, one may come to understand many of nuances of what role fashion serves in contemporary society.

In conclusion I would like to return to the three-tiered approach to dress that I introduced in Chapter One. I see that the three responses to the untenable nature of the contemporary fashion industry, as expressed in the sustainability movement, correlate with this breakdown of fashion, clothing, and style. In other words, the practical efforts of the sustainability movement itself (as particularly manifested in the fashion industry) parallel one of these three frameworks.

The fashion industry, or *fashion*, is embracing technology and technologically advanced materials as a way to hold on to the notion of the “new” while still attempting to be more sustainable. This move can be seen as a reaction against the “granola” sustainability efforts in which sustainability means nothing but a return to the earth and craft. Advocates of technological advances as a key to sustainability are those who see technology as an inevitability – as well as a means of “enhancing” bodies to make bodies themselves – not just fashion – more sustainable.

If one views clothing as primarily a means of relating to others, *dress as relationship*, then under the sustainability paradigm, one should begin to consider the multitude of others who are affected by the production and distribution of clothing. These ethical considerations have been a part of the sustainability conversation, and I believe they are also closely linked to the role that fashion serves in society. As I have argued above, clothing can be a tool that allows individuals to create social connection and relationships. Extending the concerns of sustainable to including the notion of “sustaining people” enables the manufacture of clothing to continue, but perhaps in a more holistic and ethically conscious manner.

Many people think of sustainable fashion as associated with a hippie movement where clothes are made of all organic materials. This is often part of a dismissal of the very idea of sustainability because it is too closely connected to a “tree-hugger,” arts and crafts, Zen, “Mother Earth” mentality. However, while this is an obviously limited perspective on what sustainability is about, it is not too off base. In contrast to the move towards technology as a means of achieving sustainability, there is the equally (if not more) valid approach defined through a return to the craft of garment making. Advocates

of this way of viewing sustainability see a return to precise tailoring and attention to detail, answer to the predicament of the fashion industry. I see a renewed focus on craftsmen – or the fashion designer as skilled tailor. If one can imbue fashion garments, or the act of garment-making, with greater attention to detail and craft, then individuals would begin purchasing garments with this in mind. They would begin buying items with “lasting” value instead of items meant to be worn once (or one season) and then disposed. This so-called “slow fashion” movement is in essence a focus on the persons making the clothes – valuing the relationship between craftsperson and consumer – rather than fast fashion, where machine-made garments are used and disposed without any concern for the way in which the garment was produced.

Connected to this renewed interest in craft is a focus on the rituals surrounding clothing. As individuals become more concerned with slow fashion and taking the time to know and appreciate the ways in which their clothing is being produced, the very act of purchasing and wearing clothes takes on a more ritualistic or sacred tone. It is interesting to note as well that even the very garments gaining in popularity now, alongside the rise in sustainability, are garments inspired by tribal and Native American spirituality. This quest for “relationship” or meaning that extends beyond the garment itself is displayed in all these various ways.

Finally, as many more people begin to see the value of *style* over fashion, thanks in no small part to street style blogs and photographers like Scott Schuman, etc., the sustainability movement has found a great support. If individuals begin to desire style over the latest trendy item, the fashion industry may move at a much slower pace. An interest in dress as art focuses on the overall “look” of an individual, regardless of status

or labels and seems to work both in conjunction as well as in contrast to the fashion industry as it currently exists. This call for individuals to use their imagination in the way they dress is a much higher order than just reaching for the highest price tag. Additionally, the focus on style involves an interest in a wide variety of clothing items – from different historical eras as well as exotic locations – further defeating some of the allure of “fast fashion.”

To regard dress as play, or a form of art, is to again bestow upon it a value aside from its ability to transform the body. It is to value the craft and the imagination of garment creation as much as one would value a fine work of art. A move toward sustainability is bolstered by more and more museums seeking to preserve and conserve fashion garments that also cement in the popular psyche the idea that material garments are items to be preserved, not worn and then disposed. It perpetuates the idea that garments should be valued when they have timeless qualities and staying power.

Concluding with this point concerning the preservation of garments in museums as a way of promoting sustainability in fashion, we can now revisit the McQueen exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. This exhibition represented such a poignant cultural moment not only because of the ways it solidified efforts to preserve and display fashion as works of art, but also because of the sheer morbid fascination many people had with McQueen and his particular designs. It seems an appropriate conclusion to this project then to note that it is precisely the connection between clothing and mortality that simultaneously attracts and repels people from fashion. As Karen Hanson has written: “Our clothing is a testimony to our embodiment, it can whisper of the actual material

death that, as humans, we may rather seek, in vain, to avoid. The uncanny quality of empty clothes may quietly speak of the intensity of the fact of our embodiment and thus at once murmur the truth of our *real* mortality.”¹⁹⁶ She goes on: “Clothes, in their intrinsic and yet always breakable relation to our embodied life, can seem a *memento mori*.”¹⁹⁷ Fashion in general and McQueen’s designs in particular reflect our mortality back to us. If learning how to live in this world also involves learning how to die, it seems that engaging the clothed or fashioned self is one step towards truly learning how to live.

¹⁹⁶ Hanson, Karen. “Dressing Down Dressing Up – The Philosophic Fear of Fashion.” *Hypatia* vol 5 no 2, 114.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 115

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