

# Reflections on the Impact of Modernity in Evolving a Multi-faceted Individual Identity

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Modernity, Postmodernity & Capitalism

December 21, 2001

## Abstract

There was a time in human culture when people owned minimal clothing, knew a limited number of people, all of whom lived within a small radius of each other, and had a lifestyle that resembled all of the people in the physical vicinity. This has changed. Aspects of modernity have made it possible for people to diversify their interests, their communities, and the ways in which they participate in modern culture. By encouraging self-actualization, developing capitalism, and evolving a multi-cultural metropolis, modernity has developed new possibilities for considering the self in relation to society. This has allowed for the realization of certain aspects of individuality, encouraging people to explore who they are in relation to those around them. As such, people have learned to control aspects of their identity in new ways.

In this paper, i will reflect on how the evolution of modernity has impacted individual identity. From this perspective, i will discuss the ways in which people perform aspects of their identity, introducing the postmodern conception as well as the evolution of fashion in everyday life. Using performativity and the historical perspective, i will introduce the postmodern idea of fragmentation of self, primarily to offer an alternative multi-faceted reading of identity. The goal of this paper is to

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<sup>1</sup> I should note that my name officially lacks capitalization (for historical, political, philosophical, and aesthetic reasons). In addition to my name, but for the same reasons, i do not capitalize the lone letter used to refer to myself, except when it begins a sentence.

highlight aspects of modernity that helped evolve a contemporary view of multifaceted identity. To do so, i will examine a series of modernity's features, most notably self-awareness, industrialization, and the emergence of the city.

## **Introduction**

In our contemporary global society, the importance of identity is constantly acknowledged. Through the lens of individually constructed identity, we see ourselves in relation to those around us, reflect on differences and similarities, and try to make sense of our experiences in a coherent fashion. It is through this lens that we are able to interact globally while maintaining a distinct sense of self. Through performance of our self, most noticeably through fashion, we are able to reveal our internalized self-view to those around us. Given the diversity of our interactions, we have learned to contextually reveal particular facets of our identity, or from a postmodern perspective, fragment ourselves. While this negotiation is relatively fluid in our daily lives, self-awareness and diversity of interactions only emerged in relatively modern times.

To understand the power of identity and its role in social navigation, we must step back and make sense of how these ideas emerged, starting with the ideas of self-awareness that erupted during the Enlightenment. By uncovering major issues of modernity, we can start to see how identity and self-perception evolved alongside the culture that modernity brought on, including the division of labor, mass production, the emergence of the city, and the importance of fashion. This groundwork will allow us to analyze how individuals articulate different aspects of their identity, both internally and externally.

In order to discuss the impact of such philosophies, it is necessary to understand the concepts behind the terms. Unfortunately, these terms are ambiguous and inconsistent. Although i do not profess to be able to offer a clearer understanding, by providing a description of these ideas, i intend to convey crucial perspectives that i will use throughout the discussion. My brief descriptions of *modernity*,

*postmodernity, identity and fragmentation/faceted self* precede the historical discussion of modernity's impact on identity in the hopes that an explanation will enrich the latter conversation, albeit by dividing aspects of the terminology's history.

### ***What is modernity?***

According to Baudelaire, modernity, as it applies to art, is "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is eternal and immutable (Baudelaire 1964 [1863]: 13)." This approach reveals the primary attribute of modernity – modernity is a direct response to the art, politics, economics, culture, philosophy, and society that preceded it. Modernity provides for a complete cultural overhaul, along a tremendous number of axes. Profound shifts in intellectual assumptions, such as emphasis on rationalism, critical thinking, and universal truths, pervade all aspects of the cultural change brought on by modernity.

Artistically, this period allowed for immense changes in formal technique, a move from realism to expressionism, an emphasis on the conceptual features, and a belief in a universal aesthetic (Butler 1994: 16). Economically, modernity coincides with industrialization, the division of labor, mass production, and the evolution of capitalism. Politically and socially, modernity offers a break from the feudal aristocracy and suggests an economic-based meritocracy organized into nation-states. Culturally, and in response to the economic changes, the onset of modernity allowed the metropolis to emerge, fashion to become part of everyday life, and individual self-awareness to change the ways in which people interact. By emphasizing reason and universal truths, even in religious thought, modernity devalues the importance of the Church and the belief that religion holds the only eternal truths.

In short, the features of modernity affect every aspect of society. Conceptually and socially, modernist philosophies ask individuals to self-reflect and recognize the universality of knowledge that can be acquired through rationally and scientific thinking. "Generally perceived as positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic,

universal modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production" (Harvey 1990: 9).

### ***What is postmodernity?***

In contrast to modernity, postmodernity "privileges heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse. Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourses... are the hallmark of postmodernist thought..." (Harvey 1990: 9). The philosophies behind postmodernity emphasize relative truths and a rejection of 'meta-narratives,' pushing the concept of the ephemeral further.

Many believe that we currently exist within a postmodern society, yet are ambivalent to whether postmodernity is an extension of, or a break from modernity. Like modernity, postmodernity asks the individual to reject all assumptions, including those traditionally attributed to modernity, such as universality and scientific truths. Postmodernity further deconstructs hierarchies, such as the separation between high and low art and the relationship between time and space (culturally seen as globalization). In return, postmodernity suggests that everything is relative and ephemeral. It is within this eradication of all universal truths that Nietzsche could exclaim, "God is dead."

In a sense, postmodernity (or late modernity) takes modernity one step farther, questioning both what modernity left untouched in addition to the cultural features brought on by modernity. Philosophies of deconstruction allow society to question religion, the nation-state, capitalism, individuality, etc. As a result, postmodernity uses modernity's techniques reflexively, which can be considered either a continuation or a break from modernity.

### ***Individual identity***

People have not always been self-aware or conscious of themselves as individuals. Without this self-awareness (brought on by modernity), it is impossible to discuss

individual identity. Although the evolution of self-awareness will be discussed later, i believe that introducing different approaches to individual identity will facilitate a discussion of the historical evolution of modernity and its impact on identity, thereby making the discussion more meaningful.

As with any ethereal concepts, identity is constructed. The ways in which it is constructed, who controls the construction, and how that construction is manifested are heated contemporary debates, particularly in postmodern theory. For the purpose of this discussion, i draw from a variety of approaches to view identity as the aggregation of two components – internal identity and social identity. This approach draws from a variety of philosophers, including Freud’s structural theory of the mind (id, ego, superego) (Freud 1974 [1923]), and Mead’s social identity comprised of “me” and “I” (Mead 1934), which builds on Adam Smith’s notion of the object self and the acting self (Smith 1976 [1790]).

Internal identity, or self-identity, refers to the self-perception of the individual in relation to the world. “Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (Giddens 1991: 53). Although reflective in nature, self-perception cannot be purely manifested internally. Without society as a basis for comparison or reflexivity, there can be no internalized evaluation. As such, social experience and interaction provides the model by which individuals can give meaning to the physical, psychological, philosophical, and moral aspects of their identity.

Alternatively, when an individual interacts with others, s/he<sup>2</sup> conveys aspects of himself through a set of signals that others must learn to read and evaluate. The

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<sup>2</sup> When reflecting on identity, gendered pronouns convey a tremendous amount of unintended meaning. At this juncture, there is no consensus on which non-gendered pronouns are most acceptable, although there are approximately 25 different publicly used variations. For the purpose of this paper, i have chosen to use a set that is the most comfortable and least derivative of traditional pronouns – s/he, hir, and himself (all of which combine the traditional male and female pronouns).

negotiation between self-presentation and external evaluation can be viewed as a performance, which helps construct an individual's social identity (Goffman 1956). While individual identity is entirely constructed by the individual, social identity is perceived externally, relying not on the intention, but the effective expression and perception of an individual's presentation.

Through constant interplay, the social identity feeds the internal identity, which in turn manifests itself as an evolving social identity. Interaction between the internal and social identity of an individual allows hir to react to and gain from society's impact, constructing hir identity based on personal reactions to experiences.

### ***Fragmented/Faceted identity***

As one's identity is constantly altered by the individual's relationship with society, it is reasonable to assume that diverse societal forces might affect individuals in conflicting or complicated ways. As i will discuss later, characteristics of modernity dramatically impacted the diversity of cultural forces creating a scenario where contemporary individuals are constantly negotiating between a wide variety of roles and social interactions.

Current thought articulates two theories of the self – cohesive and fragmented identity. The former, often associated with early or pre modernity, values the individual's identity as universal. From a cohesive identity perspective, the individual's internalized identity is directly and consistently related to hir social identity, whereby the individual conveys himself equally to himself and others. Postmodernists feel that, by encouraging the individual to reflexively respond to diverse stimuli, modern society fragments the individual internally and externally. According to postmodern theory, the fragmented individual who must play a variety of roles is undergoing an identity crisis.

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I argue that modern society fragments the social identity by altering not only the stimuli but also by suggesting proper presentations of self and culturally appropriate responses to social situations. While this external aspect of identity is contextually fragmented, the individual's self-perception is cohesive. Although postmodernity speaks of performativity of fragmented identities, I believe that individuals are performing a multi-faceted identity. By grasping the impact of their performance in society, they have learned to read the context of a situation and convey the appropriate information, tone, and attitude to be read as desired. Although this is unconscious, this form of performativity does not disrupt the internal identity. Instead, it controls which aspects of the internal identity are to be put forth, and how to weight the reaction to the perceived, but strictly controlled, social identity.

### ***Building from the terminology***

Because (post)modernity and individual identity are tightly coupled concepts, dependent on one another and their reactionary evolution, it is difficult to ground the terms. Yet, as we begin to discuss the evolution of self-awareness and the emergence of modernity, it is important to simultaneously consider the impact of these changes on the individual and individual identity. The next section will briefly highlight the historical evolution of modernity, emphasizing aspects that particularly relate to the construction of identity.

### **Evolving self-awareness**

Prior to the Enlightenment, Europe was primarily a feudal society, marked by a hierarchical social order where each person was engaged in a specified cultural role. Individuality played no role in society and the aristocracy controlled the masses, regulated their freedom as well as their prosperity. According to the Church, Christianity held the only eternal truths. Through this power, the Church played an intimate role in everyday life where people viewed their misery as a struggle to serve God.

It was in this context that Descartes tried to rebuild societal axioms through logic and reason, in order to prove the existence of God. Simultaneously, merchants began to view their economic prosperity as a result of individual merit and, out of anger over taxation, began to question the value of the aristocracy. This questioning of authority – philosophical and political – became the backbone of a new form of thinking, termed the Enlightenment. The philosophers of the Enlightenment provided grounding for the evolution of modernity, allowing for the emergence of diversity of labor and the metropolis.

### ***Emerging ideas of the Enlightenment Project***

The concepts surrounding the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment Project were a direct response to the feudal, aristocratic, and religious society of the time. These new philosophies challenged old ways of thinking by emphasizing secular ideas of scientific reasoning, universal truths, individuality, and the pursuit of progress and freedom. Following from these ideas, the Enlightenment encouraged people to be more self-aware and critical of all assumed truths or beliefs. Enlightenment philosophers believed that this awareness was empowering and would allow for individuals to evolve socially as well as mentally. Immanuel Kant, one of the prominent figures in the critical philosophy movement, suggests that:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. (Kant 1983 [1784]: 41)

By eradicating the notions that 1) the state had control over the individual and 2) the individual needs the state's guidance for survival, the Enlightenment built the foundation for individual identity. By valuing moral autonomy, or individual self-determination, Enlightenment philosophers promised freedom and individualism, theoretically projecting a utopian society without hierarchies and inequality. Ironically, as Sartre noted, this freedom begets personal burden.

Man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he has not created himself - and is nevertheless free. Because having once been hurled into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. (Sartre 1956)

Regardless of the burden, self-awareness and critical perspective are fundamental developments of the Enlightenment era and dramatically altered people's perceptions of society and self. This thinking incited severe political and economic changes, thus beginning the age of modernity and setting the stage for the economic division of labor.

### ***The Division of Labor***

Alongside the economic changes that allowed merchants to question authority, laborers who had begun forming more geographically compact villages started to recognize the value in dividing labor roles to provide for more efficient production. In his canonical piece, *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argued that the division of labor and an economic viewpoint that saw labor as a commodity would increase the productivity of a society, thereby empowering the masses (Smith 1776). By increasing the efficiency of individual laborers and leveraging individual capabilities, goods could be mass-produced. As such, Smith proposed, individuals would have increased access to luxuries and more opportunity for leisure.

Although fundamentally discussed in terms of economic productivity, the division of labor also constructs a separation of people based on labor roles. This novel form of differentiation allowed for individuals to have distinct, but socially equal, labor roles. In theory, by valuing individual strengths and capabilities, such an economy would enable people to pursue the roles to which they aspire. Not only should such a system provide for economic freedom, but also personal freedom in the form of social choices. As a labor role can be seen as an expression of one's identity, determination of this role might also allow for more individual control over self-identity.

While Smith sees the division of labor as the ultimate opportunity for individual freedom, Emile Durkheim argues that it simultaneously offers autonomy and increased dependence on society, weakening the intensity of the common consciousness.

Social life derives from a dual source, the similarity of consciousness and the social division of labor. In the first case the individual is socialized because, in the absence of any real individuality, he is united with others with whom he shares a common likeness, becoming part of the same collective type; in the second case, because, while having an appearance and personal activity which distinguish him from others, he is dependent on them to the same extent that he is distinguished from them, and consequently upon the society which results from this combination. The similarity of consciousness produces juridical rules accompanied by the threat of repressive sanctions which impose uniform beliefs and practices on everyone (Durkheim 1989 [1893]: 49-50).

Taken a bit farther, not only might the division of labor impose uniform values, but through mass production, it also has the potential to eliminate variability in goods. By offering consumers access to a widened array of available resources and commodities, while simultaneously limiting or controlling the items available, the division of labor presents a dualism in the "freedom" of consumption. This duality has implications for an individual's self-perception. On one hand, the opportunity for personal choice and access to desired luxuries offers individuals the ability to freely construct an aspect of their identity. On the other, forcing consumers to choose between a series of predetermined options restricts individuality and requires people to subscribe to normative ideas of consumption. Fashion and the consumption of clothing, discussed later in this paper, is an exemplary site of this dichotomy.

### ***The Metropolis***

Without enough geographical critical mass, the division of labor would not be an effective means of increased productivity. Through the development of factories and mass production, the modern city emerged and matured. People from diverse backgrounds converged physically for employment and habitation. This created a collision of cultures, values, religions and interests. Simmel suggests that the city affects the psychological condition of the individual by magnifying the quantity of differences to which s/he must respond.

The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. Man is a creature whose existence is dependent on differences, i.e., his mind is stimulated by the difference between present impressions and those which have preceded. (Simmel 1971: 324)

Social interactions force people to self-reflect and adjust their perception of self accordingly. By presenting an individual with an enormous diversity of people and experiences, the city encourages the individual to respond to a diversity of forces that are not present in a homogenous environment. In such a heterogeneous environment, the individual cannot assume extensive likeness. As such, s/he is encouraged to realize and respect particular facets of similarity. This realization allows the individual to develop an intense sense of self, in constant relation to those around hir. Using this awareness of similarity allows hir to interact with others on an appropriate plane, sharing similar facets of each other's identity. Through the diversity available, the city allows the individual to reflect, adjust, and develop in new ways.

The metropolis is not just a site for personal development of identity; it is also a dynamic system, allowing for constant interplay between the city and its inhabitants. Through his examination of London, Jonathan Raban views the city as soft and malleable, constantly affected by its relationship with its inhibitors.

For better or worse, [the city] invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape that you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a map fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mold them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our personal form on them. (Raban 1974: 9-10)

Such interplay between the city and the individual may not always be to the advantage of individuality. As the city reflects the masses, it is likely to construct a set of local norms based on popular values, thereby allowing for homogenization. Ideally, a city can be diverse enough so that no universal values overwhelm its character. Without such diversity, marginalized individuals continue to be voiceless.

While the city may offer individuals the opportunity to self-reflect and develop individuality, the very chaotic nature that offers immense diversity may also be overwhelming. Engels sees the city as oppressive and problematic to individual

development. By allowing individuals to be self-absorbed, he suggests that the city allows the individual to devolve.

The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads of which each one has a separate principle and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme. (Engels 1969 [1845])

Whether it is beneficial or detrimental, the city challenges its inhabitants to react. This reaction allows an individual to refine his identity. The negotiation between the individual and the environment provides stimulus; how the individual internalizes and responds to this stimulus provides insight into his nature.

### ***Self-awareness***

Bolstered by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the economic and urban changes of modernity pushed self-awareness. Although simultaneously creating individualism and conformity to social norms, these changes alter the ways in which individuals perceive themselves and their identity. In a sense, modernity bridged the social and internal aspects of identity, allowing the individual to negotiate and evolve the two in revolutionary ways. By encouraging the individual to reflect on the impact of differentiated roles and the intense stimuli of the metropolis, these attributes of modernity heightened the development of one's internal identity. Simultaneously, aspects of modern life also allowed the individual to evolve his social identity, particularly through the evolution of fashion, seen as part of the performance of the self.

## **Identity Revealed**

In the last few centuries, individuals have become more self-aware, surrounded by people of greater diversity, impacted by a wider variety of stimuli, and given more choices as to how they can interact with society. Within the metropolis, individuality

has started to be valued. As such, people need ways to differentiate themselves from the masses. To be seen means to be valued, which holds ideals of prosperity and power.

The desire to be seen encourages a certain level of performativity, where individuals attempt to control how they were perceived by altering aspects of their social identity to fit the appropriateness of a given context. Although fundamentally discussed by postmodern theorists, ideas of performativity can be seen throughout the theories of modernity. In particular, fashion provides an arena in which members of society can convey aspects of their identity to both differentiate themselves from and situate themselves within the masses.

### ***Performance of Identity***

In order to negotiate a social context, an individual must be aware of the different information around hir, including the contextual value of the physical environment (e.g., pub versus opera house) and the signs that s/he receives from the other people. An individual can understand available cues and relate them to previous experiences, thereby inferring a lot about what is socially appropriate in this space and whether or not it will meet hir needs. This type of knowledge is particularly crucial in a new public sphere or when interacting with strangers. By increasing and diversifying the people in a physical space, the metropolis made such negotiations necessary and common.

In his theory of performance, Goffman offers an approach for perceiving how individuals communicate and understand social cues. In order to relate to others, an individual must be able to make sense of what information they are given and react accordingly. Goffman suggests that this negotiation is done as a performance, where an individual is both *giving* information through the form of verbal language and its substitutes and *giving off* information through more subtle cues, some of which conflict with the information *given*, either intentionally or unintentionally (Goffman 1956: 2). Although the individual may control what s/he is conveying, the

performer requires an audience, someone to respond to the information given. The ways in which the viewer reads and reacts to the information presented feeds into the performance.

Viewing social interaction as an articulated performance gives the individual a lot of control in a social situation; s/he controls how people see hir, and how s/he responds to others' interactions. This is particularly desirable in the society that modernity allowed to evolve, where individuals are likely to interact with diverse strangers of whom they know nothing and in contexts that are always changing. Thus, they perform in order to control the impression given and convey particular information about themselves.

Although not articulated as such, Baudelaire's discussion of the flâneur can be read through the lens of performance, revealing the interaction between observation and presentation. The flâneur is a figure of the city, a character that, happiest amidst the crowd, enters the public sphere both to observe and be observed. As Baudelaire describes him, the flâneur seeks explicit control of how he is seen and delicately observes the signals that those around him are giving.

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito... He delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed - in a word, he delights in universal life. (Baudelaire 1964 [1863]: 9-10)

Through his rich description of the flâneur, Baudelaire conveys the mindset and approach of this city figure, showing how the flâneur is constantly constructed – to be seen, or not seen, as appropriate – yet always observing. The flâneur recognizes his relationship with society and controls how society perceives him, through his

fashion, his transportation, and controlling those who are seen with him and those who can see him. In his narrative, Baudelaire views the flâneur's identity as one of detailed performance and observation, in contrast to the dandy.

In a sense, the performativity reveals aspects of one's identity, while also allowing individuals to read aspects of others' identity. Because of the ability to control what is conveyed, individuals do not have to reveal everything nor do they necessarily have to be honest in their revelations. Performativity allows an individual to reveal only facets of his identity, given a context and a desired reading. The motivations for seeking this control are varied and individually dependent. For some, control is necessary to maintain privacy in an environment where homogeneity doesn't exist. Alternatively, in order to participate in social norms, individuals may want to reveal only aspects that are appropriate for that environment.

Performance allows an individual to maintain a multi-faceted identity, whereby particular aspects are revealed in particular contexts. Through the onset of diversification of individual roles and the metropolis, modernity created a need for individuals to view themselves as unique. Self-awareness allows individuals to gain control over their identity and reveal it as desired, using a variety of means (including clothing). For example, the onset of fashion in modern life offers one venue for performing and controlling one's identity.

### ***Fashion***

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is in the visible, not the invisible – Oscar Wilde. (Davis 1992: 1)

One of the fundamental changes in expression of individuality during the onset of modernity was the emergence of fashion for the masses. Historically, the aristocracy dictated what was fashionable, yet the common people could never attain these fashions nor could they develop their own for a variety of economic reasons. With the emergence of mass production, commodities such as clothing became economically accessible to a wider variety of people, allowing commoners the

opportunity to attain fashionable wares and situate themselves within the social order through their use.

Prior to mass manufacturing, a commoner's clothing was made by hand, usually on a per-individual or per-family basis. Because of the labor involved, individuals owned a very limited quantity of clothing that was replaced only when it became completely useless. If lucky, one might own proper religious attire, but for the most part, articles of clothing were worn universally, regardless of activity. Mostly determined based on functionality, clothing differentiated individuals based on hierarchical class and sex lines. Little individual expression could be seen through the clothing of the commoners. Even when one's clothing differentiated from another's, the individual's expression was constant as the same clothing was worn in every situation.

Not only did manufacturing eliminate the need for individuals to make their own clothing, mass production decreased the cost of access. Ownership of clothing slowly became more about desires than means. Such changes increased the quantity of clothing an individual owned, allowing the individual to associate clothing with particular occasions and change appearance regularly. By giving social context to clothing, the items themselves started to hold meaning, read not only by the individual but also by those around him. By associating culturally encoded information with various articles of clothing, mass participation in fashion began, for better or worse.

While retail offers a variety of clothing styles, sizes, and colors, it simultaneously homogenizes clothing. Even when all clothing was fitted properly, consumers had to choose between the items available to them; these items are determined based on the fashions of the time, usually controlled by those with more power/money. By controlling the variety of options available, mass production is able to dictate certain social norms, and to control access to fashion. This control, based on money and power, is a modern day fashion aristocracy. Due to increased access to currently

fashionable clothing, the masses became consumers, with the newfound ability to commodify their desires.

Certain styles, usually those worn by individuals with power, are given more weight, admiration, and desirability. As such, they become mass-produced and commonly available, thus decreasing their worth, and increasing in the likelihood of a change in fashion. To be perceived as fashionable, an individual needs to change with the ever-changing fashion. As noted by Simmel, fashion becomes a tricky duality of individuality and socialism:

Fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change. (Simmel 1971: 296)

On one hand, by increasing the access to clothing, individuals were able to use it to express themselves according to their desires, show different aspects of themselves in different contexts. At the same time, the dictates of social fashion means that the primary choice is to either engage or disengage with the social norms of the time. Rather than providing for autonomy, expression of self through clothing can be seen as the ability/desire to imitate the norms and thus participate in a homogeneously defined fashionable society.

In either case, fashion serves the construction of an individual's identity. If it is about imitation, fashion situates an individual within the society. Otherwise, fashion serves as a vehicle for self-expression. Regardless of the intention, fashion directly conveys aspects of one's identity, by allowing an individual to either give or give off information about his self, even if the only thing given off is conformity. "Our identities can be spoken of as sharing a strong collective component... it is to these collective facets of our social identities that fashion addresses itself" (Davis 1992: 17).

Fashion is one avenue where an individual performs, by using clothing to give off particular social cues, or signals. Culture gives meaning to clothing and particular fashions. By understanding these meanings, an individual can choose the

information about himself that s/he wants to convey, including abstract concepts such as values and ideas. Likewise, upon interacting with others, an individual can see another's clothing as a set of signals for accessing context about that person.

Conceptions of fashion have evolved since the beginning of mass production. It can be argued that, in contemporary times, the upper classes no longer dictate what is fashionable. Today, the gendered meanings behind clothing are quite different, allowing for both androgyny as well as an alternative meaning behind hypergendered clothing. Social subcultures have emerged to be directly associated with particular styles of clothing (e.g., goth, rave, hippy, etc.) such that the clothing starts to label someone as belonging to a particular subculture. Additionally, as access increased, people have been able to diversify their clothing, allowing for a range of styles and meanings. This allows individuals to perform different information in different contexts, using clothing to articulate a variety of meanings. As such, the changes in fashion that modernity instigated have allowed individuals to display facets of their identity, giving them a vehicle for performing their identities.

### ***Revealing one's identity***

In a society that encourages individuals to negotiate regular interactions with diverse people, quickly revealing and understanding the character of others is quite valued. Through socially constructed signals that are given off by individuals using a variety of mechanisms including fashion, others can acquire an initial sense of the individual's identity. This negotiation allows individuals to control their identity, revealing only what seems appropriate in the given context. Such control is necessary for individuals in a society dominated by self-awareness and continuous fleeting interactions.

## **Modernity and Identity Considered**

Individualization is socially and culturally produced under conditions of reflexive modernity... In such a society individuals expect to control their fates, to spend their money and time as they wish, to be in command of their bodies and their living spaces. (McGuigan 1999: 129)

Not only did modernity provide the impetus for the development of individual identity, it created the mechanisms for the expression of identity and the desire to control those expressions. In his book *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens overviews how self-identity is impacted by elements of late modernity.

One of the distinctive features of modernity is an increasing interconnection between two extremes of extensionality and intentionality: globalizing influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other... [I focus on] the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which are shaped by – yet also shape – the institutions of modernity. The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities... individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications... In the settings of what I call 'high' or 'late' modernity – our present-day world – the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. (Giddens 1991: 1-2, 4)

The self-awareness brought on by modernity allows individuals to develop a complex sense of self that constructs personal identity. With individual choice, the traditional roles lost their hold, requiring individuals to define themselves in ways that society had always done for them. With the power for self-definition comes the ability to control one's identity and the perception or evaluation of others in comparison to that self. While individual control has increased, the impact of social norms and those in power has not been eliminated. Individuality in a pure form does not exist, precisely because individuals are constantly reacting to, being affected by, and negotiating within a particular society. Unfortunately, the division of individuals is not always universally advantageous.

Modernity, one should not forget, produces difference, exclusion and marginalization. Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualization, of self. (Giddens 1991: 6)

With the need for suppression of self, or individual privacy, comes the need to convey only particular features of one's identity. It has become common for postmodern thinkers to suggest that individuals fragment their personal identity. Unfortunately, by fragmentation, they suggest that an individual is completely separated and unsure of himself. Although the social self may appear to be fragmented, this coincides with the individual's increased self-awareness and control

of self. As such, i theorize that the individual does not fragment himself; instead, s/he offers facets of hir cohesive identity in a controlled manner during social interaction. By learning to recognize what is appropriate in a given context, an individual can offer information appropriate to convey the aspects of himself that fit into that situation, allowing for a skilled performance.

Modernity has constructed a set of social changes that requires individuals to change as well. Self-awareness, combined with changes in economic structure and the development of the city, has allowed individuals to reflexively construct their individual identity. Through the same cultural changes, modernity has offered mechanisms for individuals to convey their identity and relate with one another. To do so, individuals often construct a performance that conveys a variety of meaning about the individual. For a variety of reasons, individuals do not want to convey everything about their identity. Instead, they maintain and control a multi-faceted identity, allowing for controlled individual expression.

While modernity emphasizes individuality by encouraging self-awareness, its impact has both freed and constrained individuals. At the same time, such self-reflection only magnifies an individual's desire to seek control over the ways in which others see hir. By changing the societal structure, the philosophies of modernity have changed the ways in which individuals see themselves and their relations to one another.

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