

Fashion in the Light of the Modern Attitude

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The concept of modernity is the subject of numerous theories that variably situate its birth, development and high point between the Renaissance and the 20th century. At least all of the analysis tends to agree on the emergence of the individual, and aesthetic, social and political emancipation (thanks to the reason and power of scientific, technological or political rationality) as well as the importance of the present as a criteria for evaluation as opposed to the traditional. On the surface, fashion also presupposes the individual, a form of emancipation and a link with the present. If these three factors benefit fashion to make it the field of expression of modernity, must we then affirm that fashion and modernity are like two sides of the same coin, linked by the same progression and heading for the same destination? To what extent do fashion and modernity correspond to the same *attitude*?

An *attitude*, should we need reminding, is, first of all a way of holding one's body, a position that the animated being gives him or herself, through their own reactions, with no external constraints, in line with the model for modernity. An *attitude* is unlike a *pose* that is a momentary way of being, one that is forced, artificial, calculated, bizarre, far from one's usual countenance. *Attitude* is the position one gives the body through one's own spontaneous reaction, with no outer constraints, but also without any predominant determination or will. In addition, *bearing*, the way one holds oneself requires a value judgement (be it favourable or unfavourable) as *bearing* means

the way one holds oneself, dresses, behaves and not only the position of one's body; and as for the French term "*allure*" (aller), it is much closer to action than stillness. *Attitude* relies on a critical form of judgement. But a *pose* is an artificially adopted position with a view to obtaining a pre-determined result. A *pose* has no links with the rest of the elements, unlike *attitude*, and it is the result of an insidious game tied up with constraints. As a result, it is difficult for it to serve the objectives of modernity. So, is fashion an *attitude*, in which case it is definitely part of modernity or, on the contrary, is it a *pose*, a simulacra of modernity that would be its very negation?

The starting gun

Fashion, by definition, is conjugated in the present. To question what is happening today is a process instated by Kant in philosophy. In as much as it is related to the present, the philosopher has the same preoccupations as the journalist. The specific nature of Kant's work was to propose a new way in which to relate to time, to the present. In Plato's *Dialogue on politics*, he presented all characters as if they regard their present to be an age of the world, without actually analysing the present for its own sake. Augustinian and Christian tradition take the same view: the present is but the beginning or the harbinger of an expected and hoped for future.

The question of modernity was posed in classical culture in two ways: it was either an authority to be accepted or rejected, or in the form of a comparison: are the Ancients preferable to the Moderns? Are we in a period of decadence? The question begins to be dealt with, not in relation to the ancients, but in relation to its own present. We must try to genealogically trace, not really the notion of modernity, but modernity as a question. However, the definition of the Enlightenment is negative in its own way, as a kind of exit, a split with the preceding state, that of an age of minority reason.

In *What is enlightenment?* Kant highlights the passage in his eyes of humanity from the state

of minority –as the incapacity to run itself morally and politically– to majority or adulthood, seen as a capacity to govern itself. The Enlightenment was not the moment when humankind suddenly became enlightened, free and liberated, but the movement through which the conditions became possible for the people to take a hold of themselves. By pointing out that laziness and cowardice are impediments to this adulthood, Kant affirms that no one can avoid the obligation of commanding oneself: it is impossible to escape one's own liberty. Attaining adulthood requires efforts; it mobilises moral values such as courage. So we must thus consider the Enlightenment as both a process carried out collectively by man and a personal act of courage. Man is both the element and the agent of the same process. In a comparable measure, fashion also relies on this dual individual and collective commitment.

In the commentary with the same title –*What is enlightenment?*– Michel Foucault proposes a definition of modernity that is not a historical sequence but an *attitude*: “Referring to Kant’s text, I wonder if we could not just envisage modernity as an *attitude* rather than a period of history. By *attitude* I mean a mode of relating to the present; a voluntary choice made by some; well, a way of thinking and feeling, a manner of acting and behaving also that, marks one’s belonging and presents itself as a task. A little, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*. By consequence, rather than wanting to distinguish the “modern period” from the “pre” or “postmodern” eras, I believe it would be preferable to look at how the *attitude* of modernity, since it was formed, found itself fighting against *attitudes* of “counter modernity”¹. What we refer to as modernity, instead of being a historical period, contains the possibility of a critical conception of the subject in virtue of its capacity to judge and its disposition to use its critical sense in the limits imposed by time.

Is fashion a modern field for possible experiences? Of course it is inseparable from the present; it demands a voluntary choice (for some); it is a way of acting, feeling and beha-

ving; it answers to an indeterminate plan, without any hope for realisation and achievement, due to the exhaustible character of trends and fashions. In this way, fashion is in line with the attitude of modernity. To be modern is to think of the present as a possible place for another type of idea and not respect it for what it is. This leads to the question: what are the possibilities and alternatives that fashion proposes? It would appear necessary to go back to Baudelaire when modernity leant on fashion.

The epic character of fashion

In the *1846 salon*², Baudelaire stated an opinion in which “the decadence of painting” could be explained by “moral decadence”. For the most conservative among his contemporaries for whom the only art was that which conformed to tradition, one was obliged to avert one’s eyes from the present when it forgot to honour the Ancients. However, to be modern is to concentrate on the present. Modernity is not, strictly speaking, the absence of tradition but its lack of constitution in Baudelaire’s time. The classic injunction of “the grand tradition” came from the recurrent and common idealisation of the old life, the exaltation of warrior and virile values, the cult of glorious public behaviour. It also involved representation with emphasis on the magnificent, the sumptuous, the plenty, the great, linked to the exercise of political and military power. By contesting the “spectacular” character of tradition, Baudelaire aimed not so much to disqualify the spectacular but to re-deploy it, and its oscillating character, in more trivial manner (fashion, novelty, merchandise).

As for Balzac, in the *Traité de la vie élégante*, he examined the manifestations of ordinary sensibility. The interest he had in clothing was precisely this aesthetic transformation of the ordinary³. Instead of believing that the incongruous details of his character’s clothing were aimed at setting the scene for the character’s actions, it was more a question of making the clothing descriptions a process through which the garments depicted “the man and his time”⁴. The power of the significance of the

clothing went beyond its social and aesthetic value. For those who can “decode a costume”⁵, the morals and the society, the era and the morality, taste and sensibility are merely waiting to be exposed. Thus leading to the writer’s particular attention for all that could be referred to as the “social material”⁶ or the “infinite smallness of material civilisation”⁷. The enterprise implies the description of the “accessories of existence”. How can beauty respond to an ideal that is chained in the banality of the quotidian? In order to answer this, it is necessary to observe how the aesthetic delimitation between the noble and the common became more and more porous.

In other words, how could modern heroism be characterised? It incarnated the figure of the dispossessed. The word of the hero was no longer inhabited by any feeling that would not be recognised by the public it was aimed at, just like the success of serial novels and fashion whose logic and growth speed were so fast that the public was their heroic heart. There was a parallel, a game of mirrors between the hero and his public. The hero becomes the real subject of modernity. While in Balzac, the gladiator became the travelling salesman, in Baudelaire the gladiator was to be found among the proletariat. What a worker does throughout the day was the equivalent of the exploits of the gladiators in other times. In the *Salon of 1859*, Baudelaire said: “As, when I hear of men such as Raphael and Veronese being praised to the heavens, with the visible intention of undermining what came after them, while giving my enthusiasm to these huge shadows that don’t need it, I wonder if merit, which is at least equal to theirs (let’s say for the moment, with pure complaisance that it is inferior), is not infinitely more deserving, when successfully developed in a hostile atmosphere and land?”⁸

In tradition, the beauty of the work depended on the degree of dignity of the subject. The beautiful and noble subjects, that mirrored glorious moral, political and military values, contributed directly to the execution of great works. There was a solidarity between the nature of the subject and the degree of beauty of its representation. The grand tradition

excluded the representation of ordinary subjects without grandeur. A position contested by Baudelaire: “... as to so love general beauty, that expressed by poets and classical artists, we are no less wrong to neglect particular beauty, that beauty of circumstance and the trace of morals”⁹. The consequences and principles of Baudelaire’s position led to a break in the unity between the subject and the manner in which it was represented. By virtue of this split, fashion, along with make-up and its ordinary manifestations, could be moved centre stage in aesthetic terms.

The lack of concordance between the subject and its mode of literary representation happened in Baudelaire. The era was ripe for interpretation through gestures, traits or the habits of a given individual. When the subject to be represented and the genre destined to represent it split, a new mode of organisation between the genre and its contents was established: the facts were juxtaposed without any radical organising hierarchy. It was the end of the artistic system in which the dignity of the subjects determined the genre of representation. Different degrees or types of taste were recognised without taking for granted the superiority of one over another, of the noble over the vile. In addition, the possibilities for negating the opposition between the superior and the inferior did not only precede the freedom to multiply the type of domain (fashion, design, cinema, photography, music) and to spread them to the masses, they made it possible. For example, for a technical process, like the cinema, to be qualified as an art, its subject must already be art¹⁰. This was the assumption of those who transformed photography into art rather than attempt to mimic painting as was the case with pictorialism¹¹.

The exegesis of the present

Modernity was characterised by the consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a split with tradition that reflected a search for the surprise effect, a renewal of impression, novelty, the headiness of what’s happening, the fleeting nature of emotion. This is what Baudelaire meant when he identified modernity with the

transitory, the fleeting and the fortuitous. At the same time, modernity was not just a sharper sensitivity to the fleeting present, it was above all a wish to “hero-ise” the present. However, the heroism of modern life did not offer itself up easily, it had to be captured, seized. In order to show that an era, according to Baudelaire, is no less fertile in epic motives, he defined it: modernity is not that which is immediately obvious, it is the essential activity of revealing it. It supposes an in-depth conversion: an *attitude*.

Baudelaire began with a hypothesis and moved on to a syllogism: given that all eras had their beauty, we must have ours. We must accept the hypothesis of the universality of beauty before even producing the proof of its existence. As such, we must presuppose that we do not yet know it. If beauty manifests itself in objects ignored by “the great tradition”, there is no less beauty in the most ordinary of things. He who can identify beauty in all of its diverse expressions is more modern than he who actually produces the beauty. He is the judge of his time while being confronted with the difficulty of evaluating his present. He must reflect on this meaning and the significance of the present in the present. He is not so much confronted with the present than that which is given to the present, in the name of the present, like the novelty of fashion. In this way, modernity is not so much linked to the flow of novelty than to the evaluation of everything that manifests itself simultaneously. As an example, Baudelaire mocks those painters who, finding the garments of 19th century men too ugly, only wished to paint ancient togas. However, modernity in painting should not introduce the black clothing of the time into painting. The modern painter should show this dark riding coat as the “necessary garment for our times”. Instead of exhibiting fashion in the manner of the fashion journals, he should be capable of showing, through this fashion, the essential, permanent, recurring relationship the era had with death. “The black garment and riding coat have, not only their own poetic beauty, which is the expression of universal equality, but the poetry of their expression of the public soul; an immense parade of under-

takers, politicians, lovers, bourgeois. We all celebrate some funerals”¹². In order to designate this *attitude* of modernity, Baudelaire repeated, like a precept: “You have no right to be disdainful of the present”.

Baudelaire’s modernity came through the figure of the rag-picker who, like the modern poet, treats the rejects, the junk, who sorts them, classifies them and, in doing so, makes an “intelligent choice” according to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin pinpoints the issue of modernity through an *attitude* to “trash”: “An ambiguous light falls on the poetry of the apaches. Is the refuse of society the hero of the big city? Or is not the hero the poet who builds his work using this material?”¹³ Modernity is not an elegy for change for the sake of change, but a higher knowledge of the uniqueness of the present moment that has something of the heroic. It is not a question of wandering in the present to collect curiosities, but to transfigure it by expressing its reality better than its own reality could.

This “hero-isation” is ironic. According to Michel Foucault, in the modern *attitude*, the passing moment must not be sacralised in order to maintain or perpetuate it, to collect it as a fleeting and interesting curiosity: this is what Baudelaire called a type of “flânerie”. This means opening one’s eyes, paying attention and collecting in the memory. Baudelaire sets the “Flâneur” up against the modern man: “He goes, he runs, he searches. Of course, this man, this solitary individual with an active imagination, constantly travelling through the desert of men, has a higher purpose than that of the pure flâneur, a more general aim, more than the fleeting pleasure of circumstance. He is searching for something that we can call modernity. He means to take from fashion what is poetic in the historical”¹⁴.

And, as an example of modernity, Baudelaire cites the painter Constantin Guys, who appears to be but a flâneur, a simple collector of curiosities. He remains “the last everywhere where one can enjoy light, feel poetry, experience life, vibrate to music, everywhere that passion can rest its gaze, everywhere where the natural man and the conventional man can

be seen with a bizarre beauty, everywhere where the sun shines on the quick joys of the depraved animal”¹⁵. Constantin Guys was not, however a flâneur. As proof, when the entire world went to sleep, he went to work, and he transfigured the real. A transfiguration that was not the annulment of the real, but a difficult game between the truth of the real and the exercise of freedom; “natural” things became “more than natural”, “beautiful” things became “more than beautiful” and singular things appeared “to be endowed with an enthusiastic life like the soul of the artist”. In the modern attitude, the high value of the present is inseparable from the determination to imagine it, to imagine it other than it is and to transform it, not by destroying it, but by capturing it as it is. Baudelarian modernity is an exercise where the extreme attention to the real is confronted with the practice of a freedom that both respects this reality and transgresses it.

How is it possible to evaluate the modern *attitude* correctly? All evaluation is carried out after the fact, with the delay that characterises modernity and its relationship with the present: “That all modernity deserves to become antiquity”¹⁶. When modernity sees its rights recognised, its time has passed. It is only once it is dead, demoted as such, that one can finally know if it is capable of becoming an antiquity. But antiquity merely supplies a model (logic, general method, pure art) in formal terms, as dynamics and inspiration are the work of modernity: “From examining it too closely, he loses the memory of the present; he abdicates the value and privileges supplied by circumstance”¹⁷.

Modernity vs fashion

The question of fashion, of clothes systematically conjugated in the present, of the moment, seems to command the analyses of Baudelaire. The participation of fashion in modernity can be measured against the disqualification of nature, a negation that is operated in favour of artifice. Fashion is artificial and happily accompanies modernity through its radical opposition to nature. For Baudelaire, nature teaches us nothing, it

obliges man to eat, drink, sleep, abandoning him to an animal existence. Nature is but the voice of interest, unlike the religious and civilised word. Virtue is artificial, evil can be done with no effort. ‘Fashion, Baudelaire wrote, must thus be considered as a symptom of taste and the ideal, on the surface of the human brain above all that that natural life accumulates in terms of the vulgar, the earthly, the vile, like a sublime deformation of nature, or even like the permanent and successive reformation of nature’¹⁸. One only needs to conclude with the parallels of fashion with modernity.

By stating that beauty is made of the conjuncture of the present –the here and now– and the eternal, of the particular and the absolute, Baudelaire created a crisis in the indivisible and ideal unity of beauty in its traditional form. In the “grand tradition”, beauty should be eternal, the unison of the liberal arts, the mathematical perfection of nature at the Renaissance, of the capacity to extract itself from the contingent order to the era. Everything indicates that the beautiful does not belong to its era, to the present, but to tradition and posterity on condition that it has marked its inscription in the past. This is how “grand tradition” stands out from ephemeral expressions of beauty. Fashion thus can not escape relegation. Baudelaire worked for its rehabilitation, even its glorification.

There is beauty in particular things: fashion, dandyism, women, make-up, the ordinary character, low-life, prostitution, the spectacle of elegant life, the spectacle of criminals. If none of these manifestations are in themselves, modern, they become so when the eternal is extracted from the transitory, that is to say, literally revealed. The operation is necessary. However, nothing guarantees its success. In addition, the equivalence between modernity and fashion is debatable, even unacceptable.

Indeed, the modern *attitude* encourages us to refuse fashion. A rejection that is not for moral reasons but simply, to take things as they come, as they appear, as they are, is to go against the attitude that serves to justify modernity. That fashion relies on the accep-

tance of the flow of novelties can not be questioned, one can comply or refuse. Fashion is conjugated with a “presentness” that modernity must take into account without accepting unconditionally. It is not possible to subscribe to the present, even the most breath taking without evaluating it first. Everything that is in fashion is of the present.

Indeed, an essential distinction between the adoption by imitation of new fashions and the modern consciousness of fashion that contains perhaps –to be confirmed– a type of beauty. The first indicates a dependence, or a servitude that the second does not have in as much as it is situated in the critical terrain of evaluation: what is the value of what is presented today? The modern person reconsiders the things that present themselves without following them slavishly. Modernity is critical in essence. It is the judge of the present and takes shape by extracting the absolute from the particular. It is decisive, and this attitude decides whether the eternal is present in the transitory or not. The criticism can operate only on condition that it takes the transitory into account and to judge the transitory, having taken care to let it appear, without on the one hand, reducing it to a symptom of decadence, and on the other by excluding all complacency in relation to the transitory.

It is all around us and “we have only to open our eyes to know our own heroism”. Is the beauty of the era so obvious? Opening our eyes is to operate by conversion, in virtue of modernity’s own *attitude*, a complex, anachronistic attitude for most of Baudelaire’s contemporaries. This is the issue at stake for modernity: to be able to open one’s eyes. In reality, the affair is less about a cognitive capacity than a critical capacity. It is the determination shown by someone who engages with his present differently. The notion of engagement is central. As modernity is far from obvious and it is obtained by the transformation of our relationship with the present, it is a question of motivation, of refusal of passivity and flânerie. This is how criticism refers to an individual *attitude* that enables the aesthetic reception of work with the motivation to enter into moder-

nity. There can be no aesthetic appreciation of a work that does not engage the necessary qualities of criticism. Aesthetics suppose ethics. There is no criticism without the commitment of criticism and the critic. This is why Baudelaire noted: “Parisian life is full of marvellous and poetic subjects. We are surrounded by the marvellous and it sates us like the air; but we do not see it”¹⁹. This explains how hard it was to enter into modernity. The difficulties were all the more obvious as the print of the current on one’s sensibility could mislead one to thinking we were already in the modern. Beauty is powerful in the transitory, nothing guarantees its flowering.

Evidence of this in the *1846 Salon* was the idea that criticism was the essential condition for modernity becoming real, relying on very modern art of the selective reception of the pieces²⁰. Without criticism, modernity as an act of inscription in one’s era is illusory. The work can not be read without criticism. Separate *de facto*, they are inseparable in law from one another. Criticism is aesthetic in essence, it supplies the modernity of its means, that is to say the possibility to operate social change that can, collectively and individually, generalise the necessary and demanded commitment. Criticism is essential to modernity and is also political: while aiming for the common good, no politician can ignore his time. This fundamental point bears witness to the distance between Baudelaire and individualism not only in its bourgeois form as the valorisation of individual interests, but above all in relation to artistic individualism: “Individuality –that little property– ate collective originality; and, as was shown in a famous chapter of a romantic novel, that the book killed the monument, we could say that for the present it is the painter that has killed painting”²¹. In a regime commanded by individual creation, do we not risk the chaos of an exhausting and sterile freedom? A number of artists trying to stand out alienate themselves reproducing what only a few of the most original can produce. In a social art regime, the originality of solutions is collective, unlike the individual regime of production. The glorification of the individual according to Baudelaire,

leads to “doubt” and “poverty of invention”. Most people are incapable of individual originality, they must make do with borrowed originality. In the absence of a powerful collective style, the destiny of most artists is powerless imitation. They become the “mimics of art”. Instead of being subjected to domination by a master, they will undergo the domination of a much more powerful personality.

From the production of self to economic production

Dandyism, far from being a fashion avatar, stands out to the extent that it radicalises while also incarnating the execution of modernity. How can we explain that the dandy, on the surface a 19th century phenomenon, could have existed, according to Baudelaire, in all eras, even in ancient Rome? So what is the modernity that is the preserve of Baudelaire’s Dandyism compared with historical Dandyism? A number of factors characterise it: the relationship with the era, its critical capacity, its manner of existing in its era by refusing the democratic avatars, its refusal of the conformist and plebeian character of fashion, its left-field manner of being. Dandyism can neither be reduced to its costume nor its mimics, nor can it be reduced to its body *poses*, it can be understood in terms of the *attitude* it weaves with its present through a style of existence. At the same time, this relationship with the present obviously relies on a necessity to invent oneself that calls for a choice of costumes and mimics, in other words, attitudes. The *stylised* and essentially inventive existence of the dandy dictates behaviour that is never vulgar (political regime), to combat triviality (social regime), to be proud (moral regime), to show self-discipline (ascetic regime).

How is the dandy evidence of an alternative to the anti modern character of fashion? Freed from the economic constraints that oblige him to produce the means for his existence, the dandy removes himself in his own way from the commercial era through the opposition he shows towards it, and his only other occupation is to maintain his own elegance. Dandyism is an “outlaw” institution that possesses its

own laws. It belongs to modernity through its capacity to produce a singular regime of existence: “These people have no other state than to cultivate the idea of beauty in their person, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think”²². Like a work of art, the life of the Dandy is fantasy put into action, by virtue, notably, of a disdain for the characteristic utility of economic production. If, on the one hand, in line with the norms of aristocratic existence, the dandy does not adhere to the bourgeois system of the accumulation of wealth; on the other, by virtue of his singularity, he who respects only his own laws, in the end defends individual interests comparable to those of bourgeois individualism.

The modern *attitude* designates a way of being of the subject and a certain manner of being visible to all, that can then be transposed into the costume, by one’s allure, by one’s way of walking. For this practice of liberty to take shape in an attitude that is beautiful, good, noble, honourable, memorable, one needs to work on oneself. This preoccupation with the self leads to self control and as a result to a preoccupation with others. To be modern, beyond the attention to the present, consists of a personal exercise of self-building by refusing what one is through simple social imitation. If the modern man is a sculptor of the self, he is obliged to be creative –the perimeter of which is not defined– which is not an easy task.

Modernity is not just a relationship with the present, it is also the relationship that one must establish with oneself. “To be modern, highlighted Michel Foucault, is to not accept oneself as one is in the flow of passing moments; it is to take oneself as the subject of a complex and difficult elaboration”²³. He also refers to what Baudelaire calls “dandyism”, according to the vocabulary of the time. The notion of self invention involves, on the one hand, a criticism of nature as “vulgar, earthly, vile”; on the other, it calls for a revolt of man against himself. The “doctrine of elegance” imposes a discipline more despotic than the most terrible of religions on these “ambitious and humble sectarians”. The modern man is

not one that goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is searching to invent himself. This modernity does not free man in his own being; it obliges him to invent himself. Baudelaire did not conceive of this game of freedom with the real for his transfiguration, this ascetic elaboration of the self, taking place in society itself or in the political corps. Why can't it happen in another place called art? The analyses of Gabriel Tarde are essential on this point. The work of art is not an "artificial organ added to the individual; it is, if you'll excuse the expression, an artificial, imaginary mistress. It does not answer a need, but a love"²⁴. In the aesthetic relationship, the link is not individual, it relies, on the contrary on the sharing of the relationship itself. While love between people turns to stone through selfishness and jealousy, sharing with another causes a moral pain, however, art produces even more joy as it touches more and more people. The artist adds "a new variety of sensations to the public's sensibility"²⁵. Artists replace individual sensibility (uneducated, natural, variable and incommunicable) –seriously criticised by Baudelaire– by a collective sensibility. Thus, instead of only projecting desires and beliefs like in ancient times, the aesthetic matrix, that is typical of modernity, brings common sensations to the people. Science and religion carry out the socialisation of beliefs; the morals of the state take care of the socialisation of desires; and finally art takes care of the socialisation of pure feelings. It has the power to make individual, fleeting and elusive feelings "fall into the social community". Tarde announces nothing less than the framework of a political aesthetic; whose accomplishment relies on the articulation of a collective sensibility with individual sensibility. In addition, this *government* does not rely on the exercise of a power through an institution, in the traditional form of power, but on the capacity of each person to govern himself with the autonomy of judgement and aesthetic pleasure.

From this comes the hypothesis of a relationship between aesthetic self-government and the development of economic liberalism. Can we affirm that modernity, relayed by capitalism,

has made the dream of Saint Simonianism come true? That is to say an alliance of savants, industrials and artists; a schema in which the artist has a fundamental role; at the avant-garde of production. By expressing content, he contributes to the spread and vulgarisation of ideas in a particularly effective form. Indeed, art defines the political conditions of sharing in as much as it constitutes an effective means –socially and collectively– for the appreciation, evaluation and transformation of the life of the senses.

The basics of modernity, self-invention, which is aesthetic, supposes the cultivation and mobilisation of one's inventive strengths in work. And today, this point sends us back to the issue of maintaining the strength of invention that is constituted in human capital. Unlike the vision of political economy, it is not so much the time spent working that generates value, but the individual's power for immaterial invention. If creativity obviously blooms in art, then in the pure affirmation of itself and free of all repetition, a policy that could be termed modern, in the economic sense, is aesthetic in essence. It is above all in a liberal society that individuals are invited to produce themselves: everyone becoming a sort of company of self-production (of one's qualifications, skills and imagination). It is not so much a "consumer society" that unfolds but a society of enterprise where innovation is the result of innovation in human capital terms.

If for Baudelaire, modern man was one who tries to invent himself, the liberal possibility is in the background, as is the limited and critical wording in as much as a crisis in modernity is underway that signifies its negation. The enterprise of the active capture of the present of Baudelaire's modernity is replaced –without it being the totally replacement– by a fascination for all that is present, only present, and as a consequence, fashion and the consumable. However, modernity excludes the characteristic passivity of consumption. So, how did consumption manage to combine itself with modernity? Modernity was obliged to undergo slight movements that while there were discreet and hardly felt, have nonetheless been

decisive. The over-determination of modernity is the operation through which modernity is neutralised. In other words, it may have given up its power to judge, to decide, meaning its critical faculty.

But the modalities of this transformation must be examined. So the diversification of the types of beauty as opposed to the “grand tradition” gave rise to the possible abolition of aesthetic hierarchies. This is how nature was sacrificed to the glorification of all artificial productions. This is how the faculty of suggestion of a work gave rise to the inversion of the spectator/work relationship, and to the idea that the spectator is central; and that the work of art is but the neutral basis for a more essential experience. This is how the attention to the present led to the evaluation of all events as superior as long as they are marked with the seal of the current.

All possible transformations are explained by economic (liberalism), social (individualism) and intellectual (contestation of aesthetic hierarchies) reasons. From the moment that no artificial production can be excluded from the domain of the aesthetic, we don't have to mention that the production of merchandise can calmly capture the aesthetic assumption in the programme for modernity. This is how art –or should we speak of an aesthetic and consumable experience– constitutes the vector for the production, distribution and consumption of all objects. On this subject, in the interests of making merchandise desirable, according to Walter Benjamin, the 19th century brought “women, with no consideration” into the process of producing merchandise: “Baudelaire's enterprise entailed highlighting the aura of merchandise. He tries to humanise merchandise in a heroic manner. This attempt finds its counterpoint in the bourgeois attempt, at the same era, to humanise merchandise in a sentimental fashion: to give merchandise a home, like men”²⁶. This passage continues: “These transformations consisted in the form-merchandise being manifested in the work of art, and the form –mass in its public”²⁷. As an emblematic figure, the woman appeared in big cities in the figure of prostitution and that of

the mass article. Merchandise “celebrated its humanisation in the prostitute”²⁸. Evidence of this is the travesty of individual expression in favour of a professional expression –the prostitute and the merchandise– which is done with make-up.

In the movement of modernity, fashion remains a manner in which to name a relationship with the current, its examination and the obligation of the subject to produce itself. The modern *attitude* is an attention to limits: the limits of the present, those that each person formulates for themselves and those of modernity. Once these limits have been passed, fashion is more of a modern *pose* than an *attitude*, less a practice of modernity than an attraction for its vocabulary. In as much as modernity is an *attitude*, its task is unfinished, in the margins of historical periods, and it can be brought up to date in different contexts, yesterday and today, whether it be pre-modernity or the precipitous sacrifice of modernity on the altar of post modernity.

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1. Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que les lumières ?*, available on the Internet: http://foucault.info/documents/what_Is_Enlightenment/foucault.questecequeLesLumieres.fr.html
2. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *Œuvres complètes*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 689.
3. This question calls for a re-reading of Philippe Bruneau's preface to *Le vêtement chez Balzac. Extraits de la Comédie humaine*. Texts gathered by François Boucher, Paris, IFM/Regard, 2001.
4. Balzac, *Une ténébreuse affaire*, 1841, *La Comédie humaine*, Paris, Gallimard, bibliothèque de la Pléiade, t. VIII, 1976, p. 543-544.
5. *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, 1844, *ibid.*, t. VI, p. 523.
6. Balzac, *Un début dans la vie*, *ibid.*, t. I, p. 733.
7. *Les Employés*, *ibid.*, t. VII, p. 978.
8. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1859 », in *Œuvres complètes*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 746.
9. Baudelaire, « Le peintre de la vie moderne », in *Œuvres complètes*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 790
10. Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique*, La fabrique, Paris, 2000, p. 49.
11. « L'apparition des masses sur la scène de l'histoire ou dans les « nouvelles » images, ce n'est pas d'abord le lien entre l'âge des masses et celui de la science et de la technique. C'est d'abord la logique esthétique d'un mode de visibilité qui, d'une part révoque les échelles de grandeur de

la tradition représentative, d'autre part révoque le modèle oratoire de la parole au profit de la lecture des signes sur le corps des choses, des hommes et des sociétés ». (The apparition of the masses on the historical stage or in « new » images, is not first of all the link between the age of the masses and that of science and technology. It is above all the aesthetic logic of a mode of visibility that, one the one hand revokes the scales of grandeur of the representative tradition, and on the other revokes the oratory model of speaking in favour of reading signs on the bodies of things, men, and societies). Jacques Rancière, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

12. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *(Œuvres complètes)*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1999, p. 688.

13. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme*, Paris, Payot, 2004, p. 117-118.

14. Baudelaire, « Le peintre de la vie moderne », in *ibid.*, p. 797.

15. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 798.

16. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 797.

17. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 797.

18. Baudelaire, *ibid.*, p. 809.

19. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *ibid.*, p. 689.

20. Baudelaire, « A quoi bon la critique », in *ibid.*, p. 640.

21. Baudelaire, « Salon de 1846 », in *ibid.*, p. 687.

22. Baudelaire, « Le peintre de la vie moderne », in *ibid.*, p. 806.

23. Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*

24. Tarde, *La Logique sociale*, Paris, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1999, p. 554.

25. Tarde, *ibid.*, p. 590.

26. Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 228.

27. Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 234.

28. Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 228.