

indicating the physical beauty when captured by a foreign subject of love in order to be charmed results in the gradual inundation of the captured subject, which furthers my point that Beauty, when abstracted from the real through the application of melancholia vis-à-vis the manifestation of the ecstatic state, must result in the demise of the physical body. The physicality of Beauty, upon being theorized, can exist theoretically—an idealized mannequin of the real virtue, free from both death and life. “Beauty that must Die”, in the words of Helen Vendler, “asserts but does not visualize the mortality of beauty, and the extraordinary notion of the metabolizing of nectar to venom remains an internal and unvisualizable conceit of Pleasure, intensely suitable to the poem’s intellectual progress toward truth and its inclusion of the “lower sense” of taste, but not appropriate for a visible frieze of companions in a sanctuary.” (162). This, critically understood, takes us back to an idea that Emerson had proffered: the “circular movement” of ecstasy—the itinerary of melancholy, having arrived at its end of purpose, rebounds and coils up in order to become “an” ecstasy again. The implications of this are many; apart from the “intellectual progress” and its inclusivity, the notion that melancholy can revert back to ecstasy exhibits its evolutionary principles, of its fight or flight instincts, and of its remission after the accomplishment of a creative task. Ecstasy, an idea, blossoms into creative action through melancholia which survives in the antithetical interstice between and beyond binaries, allows them expressive faculties and re-ideologues its way into ecstasy for preservative purposes. To quote Vendler again, “This ode marks Keats’s taking a more confident appetitive stance towards all passions, no matter how contrary, painful, and conflicting” (165). Rather, Keats takes a stance towards passions no matter how ecstatic, melancholic, and circular:

Ay, in the very temple of delight  
Veiled melancholy has her Sovran shrine,  
Though seen by none *but him* (25-27, italics mine).

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> 2019 marks two hundred years of Keats's authorship of his Great Odes.

<sup>2</sup> The reason why the “superincumbent tendency” in Emerson leading to ecstasy has been compared to melancholy in this essay has a simple etymological fact behind it. The word, derived from the Greek word *melankholia*, literally means an “excess”, or a medical expression for something arising out of an excess. See this link: [https://www.etymonline.com/word/melancholy#etymonline\\_v\\_12544](https://www.etymonline.com/word/melancholy#etymonline_v_12544)

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# Aesthetics of Dress: A Paradigmatic Body Form

*Sylvia Borissova*

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**T**his article considers the pledge of Ian W. King’s new study *The Aesthetics of Dress* (2017) to tell not a rigorous historiography of dress in human culture but a moving story about the body and its intentions and actions on this world. In this context, dress appears to be an indispensable comrade for the body: whether as a piece of matter for hiding or revealing (para 1), or a phenomenological “simultaneous dress” (para 2).

## 1. The Body–Dress Problem in Aesthetics of Everyday Life: Restoring the Balance between Appearance and Feel

In *The Fashion System*, Roland Barthes says that “We can expect clothing to constitute an excellent poetic object; first, because it mobilizes with great variety all the qualities of matter: substance, form, color, tactility, movement, rigidity, luminosity; next, because touching the body and functioning simultaneously as its substitute and its mask, it is certainly the object of a very important investment; this “poetic” disposition is attested to by the frequency and the quality of vestimentary descriptions in literature” (Barthes 1990: 236).

It is not coincidental that in Latin *textum* means plait, texture, structure, fabric, clothing, junction, style (cf. Lewis 1890). Thus, *dress* in its essence as a cultural phenomenon, a cultural nature and artifact in the same time is, strictly speaking, a *text* (cf. Koprinarov 2011): a vivid gripping and never-ending text speaking with all its colors, length, fabric, luminosity, movement, lightness which human bodies write, sign and stamp with their own individuality, worldview and (life-)style every single day of the novel of the world.

The figure of dress as an “excellent poetic object” can serve as a key to consider and interpret the main pledge in the new study by Ian W. King. *The Aesthetics of Dress* is part of a series presenting concise summaries of cutting-edge research, from fundamental to applied and from professional to academic, across a variety of research fields. King’s book is a

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short synopsis but meanwhile a thorough and in-depth research of the very phenomenology, axiology and aesthetics of dress and clothing in its modes of decorating, veiling, revealing, hiding or accenting human body and its different parts. The author's thesis is that not only aesthetics exemplifies the cultural value of dress but dress itself is also a means of exemplifying aesthetics—and that of everyday life in particular, so neglected in the golden age of classical modern aesthetics (cf. *ibid.*: xiii, 14, 41).

Thus *The Aesthetics of Dress*, worth to read not by the academic aestheticians community only but by a much wider range of readers as well, will involve them in the cultural history and genealogy of the phenomenon of dress in a very intriguing way since this history is told not in an usual side-observer mode but by the perspective of the human body enacted in culture. From this perspective, the mission of aesthetics is to reveal the everyday life of the body—how it appears and feels and what are the functions of decorating, veiling and revealing the body related to its sensing and feeling. Dress is the common “text” of the body, as it is in the same time an individual, communal and public unit of human life. So a phenomenological deconstruction of dress as a text would shed light on dress both as a “*personal diary*”—in modes of expressing personal identity, both physical and psychic individual qualities, level of self-confidence, aspirations, desires and dreams, and a *code* of communal or public affiliations (professional, ethno-cultural, religious etc.), status, situation, reaction to weather, and mimicry toward or contrasting to the environment as a whole.

Dress in Iang's book is taken as not simply clothing but in the whole spectrum of decorating and making the body *fashionable*, both in its meaning of *à la mode* and worldly—tattoos, haircut, makeup, accessories (shoes, handbags, umbrellas, scarves, jewellery etc.), piercings. In this sense, dress is equivalent to the very appearance of the body: what color, texture, luminosity of the textile, shining of the medallion and earrings, tapping of the dancing shoes tell, how the body is hiding, accenting, feeling itself in its dress, is the very phenomenology and aesthetics of dress.

The shift away from classical Western aesthetics and its metaphysical and static core was made for the first time within philosophy of life and philosophy of existence (the so-called *Lebensphilosophie*, presented in the works of José Ortega y Gasset, Wilhelm Dilthey etc. and *existentialism*, or *Existenzphilosophie*—both inspired by Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche); for the second time—by dynamizing the metaphysical notions and categories in the avant-gardists' manifestos (Khlebnikov, Breton, Marinetti) and later on in ontological and hermeneutical aesthetics (Heidegger, Gadamer, Jauss etc.); and, for the third time, by implementing the so-dynamized notions and categories back to the living experience through a paradigmatically new enacted approach to aesthetics which core (“and root”—King 2017: 25) already is the body in intentionality, aspirations, desires and possibilities for action (Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, Donna Haraway's new materialism etc.). The body in aesthetics as a phenomenology of everyday life is both an ontological and existential “knot” of actual, still both possible and impossible (cf. “So... beauty remains in the impossibilities of the body”, a stanza of the song *Beauty* by *Einstürzende Neubauten*), pre-subjective, pre-objective (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1968) and pre-linguistic (cf. Wittgenstein 1958) experiences and matter.

When this perspective of the development of aesthetics as a philosophy of perception—and, at last account, a philosophy of the body, of the corporeal—is taken in mind, it is

somehow even surprising that philosophy of the body in Western philosophical tradition emerged so late, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This delay can of course be explained by the Christian interpretation of spirit, psyche and body, and their hierarchical relationship. As Jean-Francois Lyotard notes in *The Inhuman*, after the age of Enlightenment—the age of *ratio*, the Hegelian Absolute Spirit and time as an inviolable eternity, matter was thoroughly neglected, only creating troubles like the “mind–body” problem of Descartes, left perfectly immaterial and non-objectifiable (cf. Lyotard 1991: 139). Matter, and the body as a *par excellence* living matter in particular, have been reduced in the Christian negative ontology of the body, paradoxically, to mere abstract notions, most abstract among all phenomena in human life and deeds. Even man's actions, in the scope of Christian tradition, are predominantly considered as actions of psyche (cf. Saint Augustine 1992) or those of spirit (cf. Hegel 2018) but at the same time actions of body are loaded with negative connotations; earthly joy, passion and desires often are referred to Devil's work.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, exactly the transition to postmodern age and its characteristics of the so-called “spatial shift”—destruction of the time flow by the expansion of culture in space, by reaching faster and faster speed via new vehicles in the surface space and the Internet in the virtual space—is what determines the end of the age of Enlightenment with its absolute concepts of time and spirit, and strongly states in its unfolding the way “the sleep of reason produces monsters” (after the name of an etching by the Spanish painter and printmaker Francisco Goya *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*, 1797-1799). The very matter—*mater rerum*, mother of things—as well as the beautiful body giving birth to other beautiful bodies and beautiful ideas (implication of the earthly and the heavenly Eros of Plato's dialogue *The Feast*), as if for the first time in modern and contemporary Western philosophical tradition finds its deserved justification of full worth as rooted, grounded and laid in *space* instead of negatively related to absolute spirit and time—and barely on this basis finding its developments (bodily actions and interactions, birth, growth, death, erosion and rupture, blossoming and flaming) in *time*.

On this ground, there is a genuine paradigm shift of re-thinking the body in contemporary Western aesthetics and re-creating a whole other world, as new as well forgotten old one—that of the ancient Greeks' cosmocentric ontological and aesthetic heritage. But now, in the age of anthropocentrism and even post-anthropocentrism, centre of the Universe and the social and cultural world is meant to be the human, the post-human, the non-human no longer embodied in this wild and wonderful world as a cosmic unit, like in Antiquity, or as a unit of the Divine, like in the Middle ages but a wild and wonderful corporeal unit solely left in its environment of megapolises, technocracy and over-capitalism while still living due to its natural heart-beating and lung-breathing.

The case of writing the masterpiece *Coprus* by Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy 2008) was just capturing that feeling of the body as a particle of matter so completed and exquisite in itself, and dynamical and incomplete in actions, intentions, extensions and strolls and odysseys outside itself as completed: Nancy wrote his book in 1992 reflecting his own surviving of a heart transplant. Nancy's *Corpus* is not only the physical body but the body as transcendental—in its pre-senses, pre-conceptions and post-perceptions, as an *a-reality* and *area-lity* (cf. *ibid.*: 43) at once. Through a bouquet of philosophical, phenomenological,

sociological and theological multiple orientations and approaches, Nancy demonstrates how biological, political, and technological mutations through the different culture ages naturally need new conceptions, modes and ways of perceiving the body, by their own side creating new promises and responsibilities. Not by chance Nancy planned *Corpus* as the opening opus of his larger project entitled “The deconstruction of Christianity”: as an idiosyncratic philosophy of the body released from the Christianity stain over it as inferior, transient, and mortal. Analyzing the negative dialectics of spirit and matter in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard draws attention to the fact that postmodern age is marked by the gap between them – if modernity marks the hegemony of spirit over matter, now spirit turns to something that does not turn to spirit: matter has emancipated itself, already speaks in its own language (cf. Borissova 2019: 105).

Back to Ian King’s new book, now the main object of his aesthetics of dress and its significance becomes more vivid and accented in the contextual light shed above. King’s emphasis is rather on body’s sensing and feeling through its involvement and engagement in the world around more than on its material appearance, in order to restore the balance between appearance and feel (cf. King 2017: 31, 36, 66) in generating new experiences. A tribute to a belated – but maybe found its exact age at the same time–awareness of all the richness of folklore, mythology and semiotics of dress in culture, as seen not through the traditional sociology, ethnology and semiotics of dress as an external object but through the experience, both external and inmost, of the body itself.

In his large scale research, *Time Images. On the Sociology and Aesthetics of Modern Painting*, Arnold Gehlen discerns a few “leading ideas for rationality of image” in art (Gehlen 1984: 14) in its different ages of development. In his standpoint, each age of art has its own idea for rationality of image, i.e. for the organization, construction, internal structure and the relation of this image to the outside world. In the development of Western art, Gehlen outlines three ideas—or *paradigms* in Konrad Paul Liessman’s interpretation in *The Universe of Things. On the Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Liessman 2010: Ch. *Snow Shovel. How Art Is Made from Theory*)—which mark the great epochs in style. The first paradigm is *ideological art of modernization* finding support always in something outside it as its motives were secondary and actualized in a picturesque way myths, legends, historical events, and ideas (Western painting until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century). The second paradigm is “*realistic art*”, *naturalistic art*, *art of pure objectivity* created when there was an abstraction from secondary motives and thus, no other option but the primary motif of the naked object and its recognition to take on the rationality of image themselves; city, streets, rivers, chairs, shoes, gardens were painted for their own sake as mere signs of the new civil society. And the last paradigm of art rationality is that of *abstract painting, non-representational, informal abstract art* (cf. Gehlen 1984: 157): there is not even a primary motif anymore, art form in its narrow sense became superfluous, and painting was a result of the increasing inability of soul to turn experience into words and dedicated itself to Tyche, the Western goddess of chance and experiment. At last account, within the third paradigm even what does not mean anything but only *is* has to be interpreted; romanticist irony has already shown the exhaustion by this vicious circle, Hegel has already foreseen the

end of art as we traditionally know it with the exhaustion of matter and subject of art in the romanticist art form (Hegel 1975).

Thus, modern art is for Gehlen “*an aliud*” (Gehlen 1966: 78; cf. Magerski 2012: 86)—a semblance of art, yet something totally different compared to any previous stage of artistry: late culture is already diagnosed by J. Weiss as a “movement without progression” (Weiss 1994: 859; cf. Magerski 2012: 86). Indeed, Gehlen sees a plenty of innovative developments within the post-avant-garde art—but not in Western one.

While paradigm-forms are thoroughly exhausted from the art point of view, it is time to turn to the potential of forms in everyday life, to return our creative impulse to the paradigmatic forms occupied by our own body—the matter closest and most opaque to ourselves, our “blind spot” (Safranski 1991: 114) which makes attainable, and realizes itself as a paradigmatic form precisely through dress in its broadest sense.

What King’s *Aesthetics of Dress* brilliantly demonstrates is precisely that after all the paradigms (Liessman) of Western art and its actual inability to bear the function of telling stories of human life, giving words to pure psyche and perception anymore, dress remains the most reliable means to bear this function. More and more the heart of contemporary aesthetics is shifting from the fine arts to the aesthetics of everyday life (cf. King 2017: 2–3, 8, 11, 23, 52 and others); that is why King offers “a different type of response, one that calls for the reinstatement of the body as a pivotal actor, and the re-evaluation of its sensual capabilities” since “aesthetics is indisputably a people-based issue requiring close examination and traditional aesthetics seemed to have forgotten this” (ibid.: xiii). In principle, “aesthetics exceeds the confines of fine art and can be claimed to be closer to a study of emotive experience” going beyond “previous normative discussions” and opening up future opportunities for empirical studies (cf. ibid.) both on local and global basis.

In the chapter entitled *The Body*, the key term of King’s pragmatic and experience-orientated aesthetics of everyday is *intentionality* as opposed to the notion of *disinterestedness* as a key to classical philosophy of art (cf. ibid.: 21). At the same time, after Mark Johnson’s distinction of five interwoven dimensions of human embodied intentionality, the body is biological, ecological, phenomenological, social, and cultural at once; furthermore, the body is always moving, changing and crossing borders.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the intended by King “re-evaluation of the role and contribution of the body for people-based research” opens up possibilities for inquiring the body as a fan of interwoven paradigmatic forms.

Dressing “moves” the body between a series of oppositions—between fate and freedom, reality and game, showiness and mimicry, prohibition and desire. Thus, the body is a nomad because “it never neglects the points (point of water, of habitation, of accumulating etc.)” (cf. Koprinarov 2013: 13, 43) but “the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 380). So, if the phenomenology of dress has trans-forming of the body as its core then the very aesthetics of dress has as its main object the intermezzo of bodily appearance and feel, the point where the intentionality of body meets the image of the latter through matter, texture, luminosity, color, all in the dress: where the intentionality of the body, so ethereal, meets its paradigmatic forms in matter.

## 2. A Tribute to Sonia Delaunay's *Simultaneous Dresses*

The perspective of dress as a materialized paradigm-form of the body is, to King's opinion, a quite necessary shift from the aesthetic centrism around the art form and its private historiography of trans-formations, weaknesses and challenges. At least, there is a chance in it for Western artistry to free itself from the layers of Christian mythology according to which the body is mortal, inferior, transient, fading into the darkness of matter.

Can we undress the ideologies of modern society and culture in which eroticism and passion, both in their physical and in their metaphysical dimension, are only a means to achieve political, advertising, media, disciplinary goals and practices, only in service of the systems that have long ago evolved in a logic other than that of the man living, sensing, interacting with the world in a living, sensing, interacting with the world body?

The body, strictly speaking in the light of its numerous interwoven dimensions and modes, is a "simultaneous dress" (Delaunay 1925; France 2002) beyond all individual clothings—ideas about it; "[B]ody is certitude shattered and blown to bits", "[N]othing's more proper, nothing's more foreign to our old world" (Nancy 2008: 5): the fire of the never-ending thought.

Regardless of its role as an alternative paradigm-form of the aesthetic, dress, similarly to fine art, has its ability to communicate as one of its main functions (cf. King 2017: 72). Thus, each materialized paradigm-form, whether of art or everyday world, is in its full phenomenological sense a text to be read and interpreted away from the risk of interpretation being exhausted while the enacted embodied experience determines it. And what Ian King emphasizes by the end of his book is that "[I]n this introductory text, all I have done in this text is introduce the potential of aesthetics" (King 2017: 74).

Text, speech, words – what the third paradigm of art rationality in fine Western art forms generally lacks and cannot afford anymore – are thus embodied and embroidered in dress as expression and image of the body, a piece of matter much closer to its motions, heart-beating and aspirations.

In all likelihood, dress is an indispensable comrade of the body also because "my body, this paper, this fire" (Foucault 1979) needs a shelter, a form not so dynamic, vulnerable and mortal; what ancient statues have perpetuated in their *Ideal* of naked beauty, after Hegel's concept of the classical art form, is what dress perpetuates as a paradigmatic and archetypical form of the body in its living beauty, physical, sensual, and expressive for "the impossibilities of the body" at once. So, dress appears to be a text, *textum*, poetic object and a basic archetype for a worthwhile living one's own everyday life as well.

The homonymous case of 'dress' as a common garment and 'dress' as a gown, *vestida de nit* or *crinoline* forms an interesting semantic connotation which is delightfully brought out in the title of a collection of poems and a poem with the same name by the British writer Linda France, *The Simultaneous Dress* (France 2002).

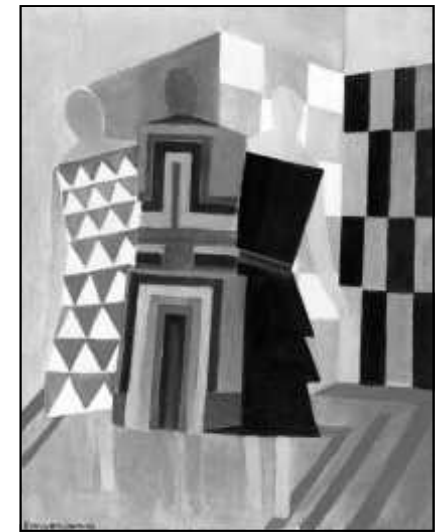
On its turn, this title is borrowed from the French avant-garde artist Sonia Delaunay. In 1924, Delaunay opened in Paris her own dress shop called *Boutique Simultané* (*The Simultaneous Shop*). Her first simultaneous dress, created in 1913 for the tango dancers at the *Bal Bullier*, was estimated by Guillaume Apollinaire as "a living painting" and "a sculpture of living forms". Subsequently, Delaunay designed her dresses by sewing together

small pieces of fabrics in different and yet "simultaneous" colours, prints, forms, textures, and textiles of different quality, "blurring the distinction between fine art and utility" (Galliver 2001). Her painting *Simultaneous Dresses* (*Three Women, Forms, Colours*, 1925) belongs to a group of paintings reflecting namely Delaunay's projects in fashion design as the central figure reproduces a dress for the film actress Gloria Swanson.<sup>3</sup>

Besides, in the early 1920s Tristan Tzara produced short experimental '*robe-poèmes*', or *dress-poems*, which were incorporated in representations of female figures by Sonia Delaunay: words from dadaistic and surrealist poems by Tzara, Vicente Huidobro and Iliasz decorated the sleeves and waistlines of the dresses, letters and images were one; "[W]ords were to be worn, and not just read" (Galliver 2001) – just like paradigmatic forms are to be experienced and not only subject to the Kantian disinterested interest in art forms and forms of the beautiful.

Both *robe-poèmes* and *simultaneous dresses* perfectly express the way in which "painting is a form of poetry, colours are words, their relations rhythms, the completed painting a completed poem" (ibid.). In the same way, Linda France's poem alludes to "a dream garment that perfectly matches the wearer's mood, movement and memories." Simultaneous dress appears to be a *par excellence* poetic and most realistic and archetypical name of the life of the body in human culture:

The secret of simultaneous dress is that you can—put it under your skin, as if—under a transparent garment—a luster of fine linen shines through.—It is not exposed at any showcase, neither—a tailor could cut it out on your body; —it wraps around you like a transparent breath;—once you put it on, you won't take it off.—Wearing it does not appear on your face,—but your dreams settle down in the bones;—in that dress and your last body—with buttonholes, wrinkles, stitches—wouldn't hurt.—For you, there are only lights left from this dress,—radiated from its infinite and simultaneous skirts (cf. France 2002).



*Simultaneous Dresses* (Three Women, Forms, Colours) [1925]  
Oil-on-Canvas by Sonia Delaunay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the Middle Ages, Christian church ousted the comic from official arts and all official ideological realms. In Mikhail Bakhtin's viewpoint, "the one-sided gravity of tone" was decisive for the epoch, "seriousness is affirmed as the only form of expression of truth, good and all essential, significant and important". Indeed, the ideologists of early Christianity condemned laughter—John Chrysostom and Tertullian declared it came from the Devil. Basil the Great preached abstinence of laughter, and, respectively, of unrestraint; Clement of Alexandria even preached a denial of laughter under the threat of exile.

<sup>2</sup> At this place, it is worth to mention the notable work of the Bulgarian philosopher and diplomat Lazar Koprinarov, *Mobilis in Mobili: An Essay on Mobile Man* (Koprinarov 2013) which in three consecutive chapters examines mobility as "being-off-to" and the drama of mobile borders resulting from travelling—borders both outside and inmost, national and hidden in personality; mobility as "re-placing" and the body as a nomad—naked and dressed, dressing as adapting with/of the body, temporality of fashion, politicization of the body through dressing, the religious body as privatized and de-eroticized, military uniform as depersonalization of body; mobility as "re-turning" in the contemporary risk society where the fear of all the unassimilated achievements of cultural and scientific and technological progress generates a "mobility back" to archaized and *magical* thinking and perceiving the world around.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Delaunay, Sonia's eminent husband, even invented a term to describe the abstract painting developed by him and his wife from about 1910—*simultanism*, also called orphism by Appolinaire. The term is derived from Michel Eugène Chevreul's book of colour theory *On the Law of the Simultaneous Contrast of Colours (De la loi du contraste simultanée des couleurs, 1839)*. In Chevreul's examination, a colour looks different depending on the colours around it, and contrasting colours brought together simultaneously enhance each other, and gain greater intensity and vibrance of colour.

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