This item was submitted to [Loughborough's Research Repository](#) by the author.
Items in Figshare are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

The body, the garment and the Kantian sublime in fashion

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/csfb.8.1.19_1

PUBLISHER

© Intellect

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

LICENCE

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Barnard, Malcolm. 2019. "The Body, the Garment and the Kantian Sublime in Fashion". figshare.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2134/25915>.

MALCOLM BARNARD

Loughborough University

The body, the garment and the Kantian sublime in fashion

Abstract

This article concerns the ways in which Kant's account of the sublime may be used to explain fashion. It uses examples from designer Rei Kawakubo and theorist Elizabeth Wilson to introduce the argument that our everyday experiences of the body, the garment and fashion are actually experiences of the sublime. In order to make this argument, the article places these experiences in a western philosophical tradition by considering Hegel's early-nineteenth-century account of the relation between the garment and the body. The article then argues that Roland Barthes's account of Erté's alphabet-drawings is a critique of Hegel and Wilson, and that it presupposes Kant's idea of the sublime. The article provides an account of Kant's sublime in the *Critique of Judgement*, written in 1790, relating it back to his account of the schematism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (written in 1781). The conclusion is that the experience of the sublime, of the inadequacy that is necessarily involved in the application of concepts to intuitions or in the subsumption of intuitions under concepts, is found in all experience and thus that fashion is always constituted by the experience of the sublime.

Keywords

fashion

sublime

experience

Erté

Kant

Barthes

Derrida

Introduction

Talking about her Spring/Summer 1997 collection, which featured movable lumps, bumps, bulges and growths on an underlying layer of elastic, and that had the effect of forming, re-forming and de-forming the body, the Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, of Comme des Garçons, said: 'Body becomes dress becomes body becomes dress' (quoted in Loreck 2002: 260; see Ahmed 2016 for photographs. In her groundbreaking and central study of modern fashion, Elizabeth Wilson refers to the 'uncanny' way in which, while not themselves living or animate, clothes in a museum – those 'mausoleums of culture', as she has it – powerfully suggest the living presence of animated and vigorous bodies (Wilson 1985: 1). There are many things happening on many levels here, but one thing that is happening in both cases is that a concept is proving to be inadequate to the task of presenting and describing a phenomenon to us. The concept of 'living', for example, is simply not up to the task of describing what these clothes are or what they mean to us because those clothes inevitably and inescapably refer to death and the evanescence of life (Wilson 1985: 1). The same phenomenon is found in Kawakubo's attempted description of her clothes: the concept of 'dress' is not adequate to the task of describing the object, what her work is, or what is going on in her work, because it is not at all clear where

dress ends and body begins. This is true whether we try to think of either the body or of dress as either object or as concept.

I do not want to pursue the concept of the uncanny in either its Heideggerian ontological guise or its Freudian psychoanalytic guise,¹ but rather to use it to introduce the idea of the inadequacy of concepts to present and describe various aspects of our experience of fashion. The article will argue that this notion of the inadequacy of concepts, common to both Wilson's and Kawakubo's account of clothes and the body, in turn prompts consideration of the concept and experience of the sublime. The interest here is to trail or shadow this concept in order to propose how and to what extent it helps us to understand what is happening in and with fashion and the body. The argument contends that Kawakubo's and Wilson's statements refer to and are meaningful on the basis of the inadequacy of our concepts to describe or understand the relation between fashion and the body, and that they thereby suggest the possibility that the sublime is to be found in all our experiences of fashion and clothing, not only those relating to Kawakubo's work or museums of clothing and dress.

Consequently, this article will investigate the concept of the sublime, looking in particular at the ways in which Kant's late-eighteenth-century formulation may be used to explain certain aspects of our experience of clothing, fashion and the body. The next section introduces those aspects by considering in more detail what Elizabeth Wilson says about how the relation between the empty garment and the absent body generates a sense of what she calls the uncanny. This sense of the uncanny will be explained in terms of the application of concepts to objects or the subsumption of objects under concepts. Having raised the problem of the relation between body and garment, the article must consider one of the earliest treatments of

this relation in fashion by examining Hegel's early-nineteenth-century account. Then it will argue that Roland Barthes's essay on Erté's alphabet is an implicit critique of Wilson and an explicit critique of Hegel and that it presupposes Kant's idea of the sublime. Barthes is another central figure in the analysis of fashion and he explicitly references and distances himself from Hegel's work in this essay on Erté.

In order to make its argument, this article sets out Kant's view of the sublime as presented in the *Critique of Judgement*, written in 1790, relating it back to his work on the schematism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (written in 1781 with a second edition in 1787). A common and everyday understanding of the sublime as something that is awesome and overpowering or as feelings of fear or terror in the face of such awesomeness, will be placed in its conceptual context, pointing to the limitations of this everyday understanding and outlining the more complicated and rewarding elements of Kant's account. The argument will then be made that (while they are not operating on the same levels or in the same places) the experience of inadequacy in the application of concepts to intuitions or objects or in the subsumption of intuitions or objects under concepts is common to what Wilson and Barthes are describing in their discussions of fashion and fashion drawings. The article explores whether it is possible to generalize the experience of the sublime to include and apply to the conditions for all experience and meaning. If it is possible to generalize the sublime in this way, then it is also possible to argue that fashion is actually at the heart of the sublime and, if the sublime is part of the conditions for the possibility of all experience, then we can explain all our experience and understanding of fashion (not only Kawakubo's and Wilson's, but also Barthes's account of Erté's alphabet fashion drawings), as providing experiences and accounts of the sublime.

The body and the garment

There are many things happening in Kawakubo's attempted description of her garments – 'Body becomes dress becomes body becomes dress' (quoted in Loreck 2002: 260) – and they are happening on many levels, but one of the things happening here is that a concept, a concept of 'the body' or of 'dress', is proving inadequate to present or describe the object under consideration. The unsettled, unsettling and apparently improper or incorrect grammar of Kawakubo's sentence may be seen as an attempt to describe or present the unsettled, unsettling and improper relation between the concept and the object. The object and the experience she and we are trying to describe and understand cannot be simply or unproblematically subsumed under either of the concepts available to us – 'body' or 'dress'. The experience of the relation or the priority between body and garment is improperly or inadequately described by either concept, and Kawakubo resorts to a grammar that generates at least two meanings and at least two understandings of the relation (for photographs of the clothing in question, see Ahmed 2016).

Elizabeth Wilson (1985) begins her examination of modern fashion in *Adorned in Dreams* by noting the sense of the uncanny that we experience when we see 'clothes without a wearer' or the clothing of people who are no longer present and who may even have gone to their graves. The clothes indicate or refer somehow to the living bodies of the human beings that once inhabited them. She quotes Charles Dickens, who imagines the bodies which once animated the clothes for sale in the second-hand market on Monmouth Street; we fit a 'deceased coat [...] a dead pair of trousers [...] upon some being of our own conjuring' (Wilson 1985: 1–2). Clothing inevitably and unsettlingly refers us to the bodies that we imagine inhabiting and animating it. Starting or beginning at the sight and experience of the garment, we are

led to conceive or think of the body that once inhabited and animated it. In Wilson's view, the garment has priority: it begins the process; it inevitably makes us think of the body that once animated it or inhabited it. As suggested in the Introduction above, Wilson's reference to the uncanny in garments is an example of a concept proving inadequate to the task of presenting and describing a phenomenon. Our concepts of 'living' and 'dead', for example, cannot perform the task of describing our experience of those clothes or of explaining what they mean to us because those clothes unavoidably and inevitably refer to death and the evanescence or absence of life as well as to the bodies that once moved them around (Wilson 1985: 1–2). The concepts of 'living' and 'dead' are too simple and too binary and 'decided' to describe the non-binary and undecidable (or 'uncanny') experience that Wilson claims we have when we encounter clothes in a museum or in a second-hand market. The clothes are not experienced or understood as simply 'dead' as we cannot experience or understand them without reference to our knowledge of the live and animated bodies that once wore them.

In his *Aesthetics* (based on lectures given in the 1820s and published in German in 1835), Hegel deals with this very relation between body and garment and presents a different and more dialectical conception of that relation than Wilson does. Hegel distinguishes between modern or fashionable clothing and the 'clothing portrayed in the art of antiquity'. In antiquity, the expression of spirit in or through the body 'determines' and 'regulates' the form of the drapery, the fall and hanging of folds. In the modern, while the build of the body 'regulates the form of the clothes generally [...] the clothes are precisely only a poor imitation or a disfiguration of human limbs according to the conventional fashion and accidental whim of the day' (Hegel [1835] 1975a: 165–66). In what Hegel calls the 'ideal drapery of the ancients',

as seen in the sculptures of classical antiquity, garments or drapery exist only to allow the spirit to appear, to be expressed and appreciated. In modern clothing and fashions, the garment is an ‘untruthful imitation’ of natural form and serves to obscure the body as well as spirit. The body is pure sensuousness and unsignifying until the garment enables the ‘changeable expression of spirit appearing in the body’, adapting to momentary changes in pose and movement (Hegel [1835] 1975a: 165). Hegel therefore differs from Wilson in quite complicated ways, but the garment is nevertheless identifiably secondary or subservient to the body, either because the garment merely enhances the spirit (as in the drapery of antiquity) or because it deforms and disfigures the body and obscures the spirit (as in the fashions of modernity). What is important here is that in Hegel’s account the garment is definitely and identifiably secondary and the body has priority.

Discussing Erté’s alphabet, in which clothed or partially-clothed women form or embody the shapes of letters, Roland Barthes implicitly agrees with Wilson and explicitly disagrees with Hegel, saying that ‘it is not possible to conceive a garment without the body’ (Barthes 1991: 107). My own failure to choose between ‘form’ and ‘embody’, to decide on one or the other concept to describe what is going on here, is itself indicative of the problem: do the women and their clothed bodies pre-exist the letters and subsequently take on their forms? Or do the women not exist until they embody the forms of the letters? The priority between body and garment here cannot be decided, and Barthes’s statement is therefore necessarily ambiguous: it might mean that as one conceives of a garment, one is forced to think of the body that would inhabit and animate it, or, conversely, that unless one thinks of the or a body, one cannot conceive of a garment. Whichever it is, there is a failure of concept to present and describe the object: we are experiencing the inadequacy of the concept to present

to us the body-without-dress, or the dress-without-body. And, whichever it is, Barthes thinks he is disagreeing with Hegel because he says that Ert reverses the movement or the priority between body and garment that is found in Hegel's *Aesthetics* ([1835] 1975a and ([1835] 1975b).

Barthes presents Hegel as arguing that the body is purely sensuous and therefore not-signifying (i.e. that the body is perceived by the senses but does not carry any second-order, intellectual meaning regarding the character, 'life', social or cultural position of an individual), and that the garment makes the body signify (i.e. it gives it meaning for the intellect, individuates it and gives that body specificity). In contrast, he says that Ert's silhouettes make the garment sensuous (to be perceived and also enjoyed) and the body signifying (as meaningful, as carrying connotations of, for example, an historical moment, an aesthetic and also a culture). According to Barthes, 'the body is there [...] in order for the garment to exist' in Ert's images (Barthes 1991: 107), while for Hegel, the garment enhances the appearance of spirit through the body. While there is no place here to develop the point, it is worth mentioning that Stafford suggests that Barthes is being less than scrupulously fair to Hegel; he presents less than the whole of Hegel's story (Stafford 2006: 153–54). What is important is that Barthes thinks that in Ert's alphabet-images the priority between body and garment cannot be definitely stated or identified. He agrees with Wilson (1985) that there is something uncanny going on. It is this uncanny that I want to suggest gives us access to the concept of the sublime and how it works in and through clothing and fashion.

Jean-Luc Nancy suggests that the sublime was in fashion in Paris in the early 1980s, with philosophers including Louis Marin, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Nancy himself writing about the subject. The sublime, he says was also to be found in

performances and presentations in Los Angeles, Berlin, Rome and Tokyo, as well as in Paris (Nancy 1993: 25, 225). Following a distinctly French version of Kant (which I will explain in the following section), what I want to suggest is that, while the sublime may have been in fashion in the Paris of the 1980s, fashion is in the sublime, not only in the early 1980s but necessarily, and all of the time.

I will argue that Wilson's uncanny, and Barthes's analysis of Erté's 'strange objects' (Barthes 1991: 107), present versions of Kant's sublime. Along with Barthes, I hesitate to say 'Erté's alphabet' or 'Erté's images', because it is part of Barthes's argument that they are not quite, or not simply, either images or an alphabet: they are not simply understandable as images or letters and as such they are, precisely, sublime in Kant's sense. The failure of reason or understanding to unproblematically apply a concept to an intuition is what makes the link to the sublime. Working through all of this should enable us to argue that Wilson's uncanny garment is also a version of the sublime in that it, too, depends on something that cannot be understood simply in terms of either the present and living or the absent and dead, but rather is made possible by the workings of each in the other.

Kant's sublime

A common and simple understanding of the sublime is that it concerns an object or a phenomenon that is overwhelmingly powerful, or awesomely and infinitely great in some way. This sublime could be a spiritual experience or an aesthetic feeling, brought on by a physical phenomenon, a spiritual event or an artistic experience. Thus physical, geographical landscapes, as well as paintings or even photographs of landscapes, might be said to be sublime and to evoke the sublime – those terrifying and painful (yet somehow pleasurable) feelings of powerlessness and insignificance

in the people viewing them. This conception largely stems from the work of Edmund Burke ([1756] 2015), who was writing in the middle of the eighteenth century and argued that the sublime was distinct from the beautiful in being something that arouses in people the physiological and emotional effects of fear, if not horror, as well as attraction.

Kant, who was writing slightly later than Burke, produced a somewhat different version of the sublime. Subsequently, interpretations of Kant's sublime have also varied, to greater or lesser degrees. There are distinctly French, Anglo-Saxon, American and German 'versions' of Kant on the sublime. This article aligns itself with the French interpretation, largely through the work of Nancy and Derrida, among others, working in the 1980s when, as Nancy said, the sublime was 'in fashion'.

This French line of thought casts Kant's definition and analysis of the sublime as more conceptual than Burke's and does not locate the sublime in any object, image or phenomenon. Kant's work contains elements of the common and simple account of the sublime noted above. He does write about the colossal and the overwhelming feelings generated by mountains and great landscapes, and about the feelings evoked by the infinitely and inconceivably great as a form of the sublime (see Section 26 of Kant [1790] 1952, for example). But what Kant does, that Burke does not do, is to consider closely the role of concepts and the understanding in the production or making possible of experience, and where those concepts and understanding fail. His account stresses the repeated attempts, limited successes and recurring failures of our concepts to account for or represent the overwhelming or the infinite.

Kant also emphasizes that what we are concerned with when we are concerned with the sublime is not an object. That we are not concerned with an object is a logical consequence of what he sees as the conditions for the possibility of knowledge

and experience of objects. He says that the experience of the sublime is not the experience of an object. He is explicit that we are wholly inaccurate if we describe any object of nature as being sublime (Kant [1790] 1952: 91) and states that, while beauty is to be found in the form of an object, the sublime is found in ‘an object devoid of form’ and in ‘indeterminate concepts’ (Kant [1790] 1952: 90–91). In Kant’s account, and it is this point that he struggles throughout the *Critique* to express, an object devoid of form is not an object and an indeterminate concept is not a concept: this is so because they are part of the process that is describing the conditions for the possibility of the experience of objects. : The conditions for the possibility of the experience of objects cannot contain or refer to either objects or concepts, (because that would beg the question); consequently Kant is trying to describe objects that are not objects (because they are as yet devoid of form) and concepts which are not concepts, (because they are as yet indeterminate).

It is in this sense that I will also follow the French lead in presenting Kant’s conception of the sublime as intimately connected with his critical philosophy, as being closely related to and making no sense outside of what he considers to be the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and experience. Kant claims that the experience of the sublime is not the experience of an object because, to put it as simply as possible, it is a stage on the way to ‘experience’ in which there are not yet objects: the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and experience of objects cannot involve or refer to objects. This is why the schematism, the process which is part of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge, is found in all experience and it is what I will explain later as the reason why the sublime is in all experience.

We need to know about Kant's conception of the sublime, and his account of how experience is possible because the accounts of fashion that have been presented so far presuppose his views or make sense only on the basis of his ideas, and they have been neglected in fashion theory so far. Here is an attempt to explain Kant's sublime as clearly, quickly and 'sketchily' as possible. This is not as unscholarly nor as inappropriate as it might sound, for Kant himself says that the sublime appears or is experienced sketchily, as a kind of 'blurred sketch' rather than as a determinate image (Kant [1781/87] 1929: A141–2/B181 p. 182-3 and A570/B598 p. 487). Like Derrida's *différance*, (difference with an 'a'), to which it is closely related, the sublime is neither an object nor a concept – nor is it strictly an experience – but it is as near as we ever get to an experience of the conditions for the possibility of objects and concepts, and therefore as near as we get to experiencing the conditions for the possibility of experience. As Derrida says of *différance*, it is the 'non-full, non-simple "origin" of concepts, objects and experience' (Derrida 1973: 143). It is that point at which the application of concepts to intuitions or objects is problematic, in that at this point – the point of the 'origin' or conditions for the possibility of objects and concepts – there are strictly neither concepts nor objects for them to be applied to. It is this inadequacy between object and concept that I am arguing is our experience of the sublime and that is found in the examples of fashion and clothing that we have looked at so far.

In the first *Critique*, Kant [1781/87] 1929) is trying to explain the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and experience. One central element of this explanation is the schematism. Kant explains the workings of the schematism in two ways, or two directions. First, he says that it involves the application of pure concepts to objects of experience. Second, he says that it involves the subsumption of pure

objects under the concepts of Reason. Kant is most concerned in the first *Critique* with the concepts of Pure Reason, but he maintains that what he says is relevant to the application of any and all concepts to objects and/or the subsumption of any and all objects under concepts (Kant [1781/87] 1929: A137/B176 p. 180). So it must be stressed that it is not only pure concepts that are involved: empirical, mathematical, aesthetic and ethical concepts all involve this application or this subsumption. Consequently, the process of applying concepts to intuitions is found on many levels, as is the ‘inadequation’ of concepts to intuitions, the failure of concepts either to subsume intuitions or to apply to intuitions.

Thus it is that the sublime, or our experience of the sublime, is found on these levels; empirical, mathematical, aesthetic and critical. The word that Kant uses in the first *Critique* to name this process, or these processes, is ‘schematism’. And the schematism is well known as one of the most difficult pieces of philosophical writing ever produced.

The other well-known most-difficult piece of philosophical writing is Kant’s account of the sublime. To reiterate, in order to underscore the importance of the point: the sublime is not an object and that it is not objects that are or are not sublime (Kant [1790] 1952: 91). A vital element is that sublimity does not reside in anything in nature, but is entirely in our minds (Kant [1790] 1952: 114). This is crucial for our later discussion of the sublime in fashion. It is not that the fashion object is or is not sublime; it is that our experience of the conditions for the possibility of the fashion object is, or gives rise to, the experience of the sublime. Until the process of schematism is completed and ‘settled’ there is no object. And if we have to suggest that, at some if not all points, there is strictly no fashion object and that therefore there is strictly no fashion, then so be it. That the suggestion that there is no such thing as

fashion sounds odd is no reason to not say it or to not question and investigate it. The sublime occurs in or as the ‘indeterminate presentation’ of the concepts of reason; ‘although no adequate presentation of them is possible’, ideas of reason are ‘excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy which does admit of sensuous presentation’ (Kant [1790] 1952: 92). The presentation of concepts of reason is the attempt to apply them to sensuous presentation: in the experience of the sublime, this is impossible because reason is not up to the job and the mind consequently experiences ‘chaos’ and ‘disorder’. This chaos and disorder in the failure of reason to achieve the schematism (to subsume objects under its concepts or to apply its concepts to objects) is the experience of the sublime.

To put it simply, this reading of Kant suggests that the sublime is our experience of the schematism – our experience of the process that is the condition for the possibility of our having any experience, and thus any knowledge, at all. When it is a process, and is not routine or ‘automatic’, then it is undecided. The application of concept to intuition, or the subsumption of intuition under concept that Kant describes in the schematism, which is never quite finished or certain, is also found in the experience of the sublime (which is also a failure of concept to cover intuition), and it is this sketchy, undecided and syncopated element (Nancy 2008) that I maintain is common to both the schematism and the sublime. It is this element that is ‘sketchy’, or takes the form of a ‘monogram’ (which indicated or denoted a sketch, a rough drawing, at the time that Kant was writing [Crockett 2001: 88]). And, if it is undecided, then it is what Wilson calls the uncanny, or, as Nancy has it, the syncope, a kind of fainting, a fading in and out of what I hesitate to call consciousness or experience. This hesitation, or indeed this kind of syncope, is inevitable, because what is being suggested is that this fading in and out is part of the process that is the

condition for what we experience as consciousness, and the condition for conscious experience cannot simply be either experience or consciousness and nor can it be simply experienced as either simple consciousness or simple unconsciousness.

To put it as clearly as possible, the feeling or experience of the sublime in Kant is essentially the result of the attempt and failure to simply represent the object or intuition in or through a concept (see, for example, Kant [1790] 1952: 108). The object is too large, or ‘almost too large’, as Kant has it (Kant [1790] 1952: 100). The schematism is the process (in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) through which intuitions and objects come to be represented by concepts or pure concepts; that is, objects or intuitions are either subsumed under concepts or concepts are applied to intuitions and objects. Kant says the schematism is found in the application of all concepts/the subsumption of all objects and intuitions (Kant [1781/87] 1929: A137/B176 p. 180).

There needs to be an unequivocal statement here: this article is not claiming to present a more accurate account or reading of Kant’s text; it is claiming that the inadequacy that Kant says is part of the experience of the sublime is actually always a part of all experience, as part of the schematism and as part of the conditions for the possibility of any and all experience. That sublime part, that inadequacy between concept and intuition, is forgotten or occluded or somehow ignored by Kant and believed by him to be an adequacy on the way to what we experience as an unproblematic object. Kant has no way to acknowledge this; he has no concepts with which to describe what is going on and it is not until Derrida’s *différance* and Nancy’s ‘syncope’ that this critical and conceptual element of the conditions for the possibility of experience is either available to a critical philosophy or can be thought.

The argument presented here is that the schematism is found in the application of all concepts to intuitions and objects or the subsumption of all intuitions or objects

under concepts. This is the basis of the claim made here that the experience and the operation of the schematism may be generalized to include any and all experience and thus that the sublime is potentially to be found in every experience.

So, if all experience requires the schematism as part of the conditions for its possibility (and this applies to all objects and intuitions), and if all objects are potentially too large, or almost too large, to be successfully represented, then the sublime must have been and is still active and effective in every experience. All objects and intuitions will be too large, or almost too large, in that there can always be one more instance, one more possible experience of them for the concept to apply to or to be subsumed by the concept. It is this almost-too-largeness that generates the ‘movement’ (Kant [1790] 1952: 94), the movement between attraction and repulsion (Kant [1790] 1952: 91), and between the pleasure and the ‘check’ to pleasure or displeasure (Kant [1790] 1952: 106) that constitute the experience of the sublime. This is not to say that we always experience the sublime in all experiences (we manifestly do not as most experiences are utterly routine and, as Hegel says, in that sense they are ‘mechanical’), but the sublime must have been there and it must still be there potentially in any further experience (before the experience becomes routine or mechanical), in the process of the schematism which, as part of the conditions for the possibility of all experience, applies to all objects and all intuitions.

Barthes and Erté

Having set out key aspects of Kant’s sublime (and their implications), it is now possible to explain how Barthes’s (1991) accounts of Erté’s strange objects and of fashion can be considered to be accounts of sublimity, and subsequently how

Wilson's (1985) characterization of garments as 'uncanny' is also a characterization of garments as sublime.

Firstly, according to Barthes, Erté's strange objects are both 'anatomic and semantic'; they are 'the body which has explicitly become a drawing' (Barthes 1991: 107). They are 'anatomic' in that they appear to represent bodies and they are 'semantic' in that they are inevitably meaningful. This is a version of a distinction we saw in Hegel, between the body as pure sensuousness and the meaningfulness of the body as expression of spirit. The anatomic and bodily are usually held apart and distinguished from the semantic and meaningful in everyday thinking and experience, but they are confused and run together in the un-everyday (or sublime) thinking and experience that the illustrations force upon us. Secondly, these strange objects also indicate a 'new relation of body and garment' (Barthes 1991: 107). It is this new relation that Barthes explores in Erté's work that I designate as the sublime, in which the body and meaning, the anatomic and the semantic, are the conditions for each other, not to be held apart and separated. It is the failure of any one of these dichotomous concepts to unproblematically or simply describe or explain what is happening in Erté's alphabetical images that takes us from the semiology of Barthes's account to the Kantian sublime. The 'firstly' and 'secondly' here indicate different levels (one is of the silhouettes and the other is of fashion), but I will argue that the sublime is operative on both levels.

On the first level, the silhouettes are sublime in that, according to Barthes, they present many of the most familiar dichotomous concepts of western thought as the condition for each other, as undecidable. The concepts we employ to identify and understand them cannot be unproblematically applied. As indicated, these silhouettes are both 'anatomic and semantic'; Barthes also says that they are 'symbol and sign,

fetish and message'. These distinctions are extremely complicated and there is not really space to explain them here. However, Barthes is suggesting that they are all versions of the nature–culture dichotomy or the form–content dichotomy, and that Erté's 'images' effectively deconstruct the difference between nature and culture and between form and content. He summarizes or reduces these distinctions and these problems to the idea that in the letter-silhouettes, Erté's strange objects both 'figure' the letter and 'unfigure the woman' (Barthes 1991: 113). What he is saying in effect is that figure and form, or content and form, become the instantly disappearing conditions for the possibility of each other and are thus undecidable. This appears to be an instance and experience of the Kantian sublime as encountered in Erté's silhouettes.

To elucidate what Barthes is getting at here, try to imagine a letter without that letter taking any particular form or without it having a style. Can that be done? If we try to imagine the letter 'a', it will have to be upper or lower case, it will have to be in some typeface or written style and it will have to take on some colour, texture and so on. Any letter we think of must take on a form and it must have a style. The same impossibility accompanies the attempt to describe or think of a style or a form without thinking of some content, some particular or specific example or exemplification of that style or form. If we are asked to imagine the typeface or style that is known as Helvetica or as Bodoni, we will have to imagine some letter or some part of a letter. Any style we think (of) will have to take on some content, some letter or other, or some part of a letter. Barthes's point is that the impossibility of not giving content a form and form a content, or, conversely, the necessity to give content to form and form to content, makes Erté's silhouettes both 'anatomic and semantic', both fetish and message and both symbol and sign.

Figure 1: Erté, *Samson and Delilah* (1970), lithograph/serigraph 15 1/8" X 20 1/2";

image reproduced from Wikiarts.com in accordance with copyright regulations

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/erte/samson-and-delilah>.

The image that Barthes uses to illustrate this impossibility, or this sublimity, is Erté's image of Samson and Delilah. He says that these two are 'nothing to do with an alphabet', but they lodge within the space of an alphabet 'like two intertwining initials' (Barthes 1991: 112). We cannot help seeing his bodies as letters and seeing his letters as bodies, simultaneously. It is this helplessness, this movement between form and content and this failure to decide on a fixed meaning as either body or letter, which can be claimed as constituting an instance of the Kantian sublime. The failure of the understanding to simply and unproblematically apply the concept or to subsume the intuition in the schematism is what gives rise to the sketchy and indeterminate, and this is what Kant calls the experience of the sublime.

For this situation to obtain, it is necessary that nature, expression and symbolism be ruled out as potential conditions for the possibility of meaning, and that the arbitrary and cultural 'nature' of the sign be taken seriously as the only such condition. And this is exactly what Barthes argues: natural symbolism and the natural body are denied or disallowed as sources of meaning for Erté's images. Barthes says, for example, that the fashion model from which Erté's alphabet derives 'is not an idea based on reason or nature', '[n]or is Erté's Woman a symbol', and she is equally not 'the expression of a body' (Barthes 1991: 105). Both forms of nature are ruled out here and that leaves only culture as the condition for meaning. In semiology, this means that the relation between signifier (form) and signified (meaning or content) is

arbitrary, the result of cultural convention. Therefore, in Barthes's account of Erté, the Woman is a sign, a cultural and conventional sign, the sign of 'conventional femininity' (Barthes 1991: 105): she is a Saussurean arbitrary sign and any meaning that she has or that the images have is the product of difference and convention.

It is this that enables Barthes to present Erté's images as experiences of the sublime. They are experiences of the sublime because they are cultural and conceptual and nothing to do with nature, expression or the symbolic. We have only culture, in the form of language and concepts, and the concepts that Barthes mentions are all inadequate to describe what is going on in Erté's work. We cannot imagine or 'see' the letter without it having some style, some form, but this style or form can only be cultural and not natural. Nor can we imagine or see a style or form without it having some content and this content can also only be cultural. Therefore, neither concept is sufficient to the object: neither the concept of the semantic nor the concept of the anatomic is sufficient to explain what is going on in Erté's images according to Barthes, and this is a version, or form, of Kant's sublime.

Figure 2: Erté, Letter 'Z' from *Alphabet Suite* (1976), lithograph/serigraph 15 3/4" X 10 1/2"

, reproduced from Wikiarts.com in accordance with copyright regulations

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/erte/alphabet-z>.

On the second level, the relation between body and garment is, or becomes, an example of the experience of the sublime. As noted above, Barthes explains this in relation to Hegel's ([1835] 1975a; [1835] 1975b) account of drapery in his *Aesthetics*. According to Barthes, Hegel argues that the garment 'is responsible for the transition

from the sensuous (the body) to the signifier' (Barthes 1991: 107). In Hegel's account, the body is to all intents and purposes 'natural' and thus unsignifying: it is the garment, drapery, that makes the body a signifier and thus meaningful. For Barthes, Erté's strange objects 'perform the contrary movement', they 'make the garment sensuous and the body into a signifier' (Barthes 1991: 107). He concludes that 'it is not possible to conceive a garment without the body' (Barthes 1991: 107). I hinted above that this statement is ambiguous and I will stand by that hint and even amplify the ambiguity. Beginning from Barthes's account, or taking it more seriously and more consistently than he does himself, I will argue that it is as impossible to conceive the garment without the body as it is to conceive the body without the garment. If this is the case, then our experience of the relation between garment and body – our experience of fashion – is also an experience of the sublime. As Barthes has it, 'we can neither undress the body nor abstract the garment' (Barthes 1991: 108). If it is impossible to experience or even to think the body without thinking of the or a garment that makes it possible, and if it is impossible to experience or think a garment without the thought of the body that will make it possible, then each is the condition of the other and we have the same sublime, the same syncope, the same coming in and out as we saw above. This is the same move as is made with regard to figure and form and with regard to anatomic and semantic in the silhouettes, but made on a different level, and it is the same sublime.

To bring these speculations back to a more elementary level of fashion and what we wear, we can repeat the thought experiment that I suggested previously concerning the letter. First, try to imagine a garment without thinking (of) the body that would inhabit it; then, try to imagine a body without thinking (of) the garment that would dress it. In both cases, one cannot be thought without the other. Every

body that we can think or imagine will be the product of some dressing or adornment. And every garment that we can think or imagine will be the result of some body or support. It is impossible to think, let alone design, a garment without thinking of the body that it is for. And it is impossible to think, or experience, the body without that body being dressed in some way. To the objection that it is perfectly possible to imagine an undressed, or naked body, it has to be said that undressed is not naked, and it is not nude for that matter. Any naked body will have to be posed or held in some way or other and any way that it is held or posed will inevitably be gendered: nude men and nude women will pose or hold their bodies in different ways because they will have different understandings of what it is to be a man (masculine) or a woman (feminine). Those understandings of gender, of masculinity and femininity, are not natural, they are learned. As learned, they are something added and therefore a form of dressing. The undressed, naked or nude body is therefore impossible. This impossibility is what Barthes is referring to when he says that ‘we can neither undress the body nor abstract the garment’ (Barthes 1991: 108).

It should be clear that we are not operating with what Derrida might have called the ‘vulgar’ garment, and that we are not, as Barthes has it, using ‘a very undemanding notion of fashion’ (Derrida 1976: 56; Barthes 1991: 114) when we think of fashion and garments in these ways. It is as though the notion of fashion has been moved back a few steps so that things that were not originally thought of as fashion now have to be. The gendered body itself is now, necessarily and not accidentally or contingently, a fashionable object, a fashioned body. For example, if every bodily hold and pose and every gesture we make is gendered and if gender is learned and cultural, then gender and the poses and gestures that construct and represent it are as much of an adornment and a form of dress as any hat, skirt or pair

of trousers. If there is no non-cultured, non-gendered pose then there is no non-fashioned body, and fashion is the cultural adornment or prosthetic that first makes the body possible (see Barnard 2014: 109–27 for further explanation of this argument). This paradox is also a form of the sublime in that neither the existing concept of the body (as natural and then adorned, for example) nor existing concepts of the fashionable garment (as accidental adornment or substitutive prosthetic, for example) are adequate to describe or understand the object. As we have seen, this inadequation is what Kant calls the sublime.

There is a second experiment. This is the request or invitation to imagine a particular type of garment (a hat, a skirt or a pair of trousers, for example), without that garment appearing in some style or other. The hat will have to have either a brim or not, and the crown will have to be either folded or unfolded. The skirt will have to be either pleated or not pleated; it will have to be long, midi or short; it will have to have a colour and a texture, and so on. The trousers will also have to be either pleated or non-pleated; they will have to be flared or straight; they will have to have turn-ups (cuffs) or not, and so on. This request or invitation also works in the other direction. If one tries to imagine pleats or turn-ups, one has to imagine a skirt or pair of trousers that have the pleats or turn-ups. There are two consequences of this experiment and these also enable or oblige us to reconsider the place of the sublime in our understanding of fashion.

The first consequence is that it is impossible to think of the first element without the second being present, as some form of condition for its possibility. The trousers or the skirt considered ‘as a whole’, as it were, are a condition for thinking the pleats or the turn-ups or cuffs that will go in or on them: but until the pleats or the turn-ups or cuffs are in or on the dress or the trousers, there is no dress or trousers ‘in

the first place'! Each is the instantly disappearing condition for the possibility of the other. This is the same argument and the same problematical paradox as was seen with regard to the garment and the body. If we cannot think the garment without the body that might inhabit it and, if we cannot think the body without thinking it as dressed in some way (even if that dress is a gendered pose or holding of the body), then we are in the schematism and in the sublime.

Kant says that all concepts have to be applied to objects or that all objects have to be subsumed under concepts. He also says that the sublime is not an object, it is something like a feeling that the mind has and it is to do with the inadequate presentation of concepts, when the concept is inadequate to the object or when the object cannot simply be subsumed under the concept. This inadequation is, or must be, present at least in the initial stages of the schematism and it is this that admits of sublimity. It is epistemologically prior to what Hegel called the fixed and mechanical form or stage of understanding (see Magri 2016: 243). Before it is fixed and mechanical, there must be some point at which it is not fixed or mechanical where or when the relation between form and content is still under negotiation. It is this that I suggest is the experience of the sublime.

I am suggesting that this is a form of the sublime, the unfinished product of the schematism that Kant describes in the first *Critique* as the condition for any and all experience. Furthermore, in that we have to make a choice or a decision here regarding the appropriateness of concept to intuition, then the schematism and the sublime involve fashion. The sublime may be in fashion, as Nancy (1993: 25) said it was in Paris during the 1980s, but fashion is always necessarily in the sublime.

The second consequence is that the range of colours, textures, shapes and so on that we are obliged to think when we think of garments in the experiments above

are the conditions for the possibility of fashion; those ranges are how and where fashion is made possible in our experience. A moment's thought confirms that each range is actually infinite: there is an infinite range of shades and hues within each colour, and an infinite range of textures that a garment may have. The range is thus properly inconceivable in terms of understanding, as both Kant and Barthes set out those terms. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant's discussion of the mathematically sublime involves, precisely, the inability to represent the infinite (Kant [1790] 1952: 102–03), and that proposition is pertinent. In order for us to have fashion there must be different styles or forms from which we choose: the only choice worth the name is an absolute or infinite choice, anything else is not 'really' or 'properly' choice but only a limitation and a curtailment.

Choice is at once the condition and the impossibility of fashion. There can be no non-cultural or natural point at which a sufficient amount of choice makes fashion possible, which means there can be no non-cultural or natural limit to choice. If there is no such limit then there is an infinity of choice: but if there is no non-cultural or non-arbitrary and therefore no natural point at which choice might be limited, then every limitation is a choice or a cultural decision. A choice or cultural decision is precisely what we would want to call fashion, and there again is the paradox or the failure of the concept to apply to the object. Similarly, an infinity of choice is one that we cannot conceive and one from which we cannot, by definition, make a choice and there can be, therefore, no fashion. Fashion is at once made possible and made impossible by choice. We are never presented with an infinite range and on Kant's account, we could not conceive or understand it if we were: it is here and for this reason that the experience of the sublime is always in fashion.

Our experience of the sublime therefore is as the failure of the concept to present the object or the intuition, what Nancy (2008) refers to as the dizzying interplay or syncope between the infinite range that must be hinted at as the very possibility of fashion and the limited range with which we are confronted and which we can conceive and make sense of in what we experience as fashion. My argument is that our experience of this interplay, this indecision between these experiences, is the sublime. It is not really or properly experience because it is the condition for the possibility of experience. Thus the concept of fashion cannot subsume the infinite range that is the condition of fashion and we are forced to conceive and operate with and within a limited range. This limited range is not really or properly fashion because it offers only a limited choice and fashion demands an infinite range from which to make a choice. When we think of that range, we have to make a choice from what is offered in or by that range. What is offered in or by that range will vary from culture to culture and, precisely, from time to time: different cultures at different times and places will offer different ranges. Therefore, we have to make a choice between all those different colours, textures, shapes and so on when we think of these things, and making a choice from a range of colours, textures, shapes and so on is what we are obliged to call fashion.

The sublime and the uncanny

We can now return briefly to the uncanny as raised by Wilson (1985) in her account of the relation between clothes and the bodies that once animated them: we are now in as good a position as any from which to understand Wilson's account of the uncanny in garments as a description of our experience of the Kantian sublime.

The uncanny is to do with knowledge. More accurately it is to do with unknowing. There is a seriously playful parenthesis here, suggested by Nancy's account of the sublime in Kant and its relation to knowing and unknowing, which I think is worth noting. The word 'canny' has an Anglo-Saxon and Scottish derivation, and comes from the word 'ken', which indicates our familiar knowledge, perception or experience. Kant has himself also been said to be of Scottish derivation. His mother, father and paternal grandfather have all been identified as Scottish by different people, including Kant himself (in a letter to J. A. Lindholm [Kant (1797) 1967: 237]) and Wallace (1901: 8–11). Nancy (2008) connects Nietzsche's identification of Kant with the word 'cant' to Kant's father and the Scottish surname 'Cant' in his book on the Kantian sublime (Nietzsche 1968: 67; Nancy 2008: 14). Thus what is uncanny is what is 'beyond our ken', outside of, or not accounted for in or by, our everyday knowledge and experience. The sublime, as an experience that is not simply and unproblematically representable through concepts, could be seen as an example of the uncanny. In *The Discourse of the Syncope*, Nancy (2008) also playfully links Kant's name with knowledge: in German, 'knowledge' is *Erkenntnis* and 'the familiar' is *Bekanntheit*. Nancy refers to knowledge as *kant* sometimes, punning on Kant's name as it appears in lower case (see Nancy 2008: 14, for example). Nancy's referencing of Kant's name to knowledge and his teasing of Kant in his earnest quest for a suitable written un-style or non-fashion in which to represent the wholly improper and unrepresentable conditions for knowledge, also suggest the conceptual link between the uncanny and the sublime. These are the subjects of further investigations that are supposed by but beyond the scope of this article and I will leave them here.

The point is that the schematism and the sublime are also forms of the uncanny. This is not only because they are both forms of unknowing but above all

because they are the same forms of unknowing: they are both processes in which concept and object are coming and going, where form and content are still sorting themselves out as the conditions for the possibility of knowing. This is the process in which form is being given to content and in which content is receiving form and it should be unsurprising that no simple written, visual, performative or other representation can be made of it: it is the condition for all such representation. The schematism is (by definition) a form of unknowing: it is part of the process that is the condition for knowledge (and therefore whatever experience it contains cannot yet be knowledge), and it is part of the process in which the decision is made as to whether this is the appropriate concept for the object or the appropriate object for the concept.

Before this decision, before the process is decided, there is neither concept nor object and thus there is no experience or knowledge. The sublime is a form of unknowing because it is also the failure, or inadequacy, of understanding to relate concept and object. This inadequation is what Nancy describes as the syncope, the coming and going of consciousness, the trying and not completely succeeding to apply the concept appropriately or the trying and failing to finally subsume the object under the appropriate concept. As in the common and simple account of the sublime discussed earlier, and as Kant says, part of the sublime experience is the experience of a positive and a negative pleasure, a coming and going, a repulsion from followed by an attraction to the same object, both a horror and a seduction (Kant [1790] 1952: 91). It is the understanding almost but not quite subsuming the object under the concept, and the seductive, positive pleasure of almost, nearly, subsuming the object is followed by the negative, horrified displeasure of failing to subsume the object under the concept. Each is inseparable from the other because each is the condition of the other in the construction of experience.

The clothes that Wilson sees in museums and that Dickens saw in the second-hand markets refer inevitably to a wearer, and it is this inevitable reference that Wilson (1985) identifies as uncanny. The supposedly dead and lifeless garments inevitably and inescapably make us think of the living and animated bodies that once wore them. There is a movement from dead to live here and the dead is not simply or only dead: the living is part of the meaning and the experience of the supposedly dead clothes. It follows then that the reference to the living makes that meaning and experience of the garment possible.

The way that life, something that was supposedly utterly different from, outside of or beyond the dead garments, actually makes our experience of those garments possible is both what Kant is describing as the sublime and what Wilson is describing as the uncanny. It is part of the Kantian sublime because it is an example of the inadequation of concept to object, which is part of the process of the schematism in the first *Critique* (Kant ([1781/87] 1929) and which occurs also in his account of the sublime in the third *Critique* (Kant [1790] 1952). It is part of the process which is the condition for representation, knowledge and experience but which cannot itself simply be representation, knowledge or experience. The concept of the dead and lifeless garment is inadequate or not sufficient to account for the garment in front of us because the garment also refers us necessarily to the life and the living that once animated it. The presence and role of life in the dead garment is what makes the garment meaningful to us: it is what makes the experience possible. It is thus part of what Kant calls the schematism and in this case it involves the inadequation of concept and object. This inadequation of concept to object is what Kant calls the sublime (Kant [1790] 1952: sections 25 and 26, 94-105) and it is what makes the uncanny for Wilson (1985).

Conclusion

I have argued that Kawakubo's account of her own ambiguous work (Kawakubo quoted in Loreck 2002: 260), Wilson's (1985) account of uncanny clothes in museums and second hand markets, and Barthes's (1991) account of Erté's strange objects introduce and are ultimately examples of what Kant calls the sublime and thus that, while the sublime may not always be in fashion, fashion is always in the sublime. Fashion is always in the sublime because the sublime in Kant may be thought of as an instance of the inadequation of concept to object and, because there is always an inadequation between concept and object, there is always the sublime. There is always this inadequation in fashion because fashion works only on the proviso or condition of infinite choice and, if there is not infinite choice, then there can be no fashion. A limited or finite choice is not choice but an alternative and there is no non-arbitrary or non-cultural point at which the number of choices becomes sufficient to be the necessary condition of fashion. Saying that there is no natural or non-arbitrary point is the paradoxical point at which choice at once makes fashion possible and impossible. None of us can say at which point the number of choices becomes adequate for there to be fashion – exactly, that is precisely the point: it is a decision that is made and as a decision, it is what we would want to call fashion and, like all other fashion decisions, it involves the sublime. Given that we are never presented with infinite choice, we are never presented with 'proper' or non-arbitrary and non-cultural conditions for fashion and so we are confronted by another failure of the object to be subsumed under the concept. This is the central element of the sublime in Kant's account and it indicates that fashion, as a cultural decision, is in the sublime.

I have argued that Erté's strange objects are examples of the Kantian sublime in Barthes's account because they demonstrate the dizzying syncope that occurs between the body and the garment. The drawings show how it is impossible to either undress the body or abstract the garment (Barthes 1991: 108). Erté's drawings also illustrate how the body is always-already dressed and how the garment can never be abstracted from the body. The body is always dressed in that even naked it must adopt some pose or make some gesture and every pose and gesture will be the product of some cultural input; it will be a learned 'addition' or prosthetic which will, as such, be conceptually or analytically indistinguishable from a garment. The garment can never be abstracted, the body will always inhabit it (which is Wilson's uncanny again) in that we cannot design or see a garment without thinking or imagining the body that might inhabit and animate it. In both cases the concept (body or garment) is inadequate to the object: each inevitably and inescapably refers to the other as what makes it possible. This failure (which is actually or strictly a coming in and out, or an alternation of failure and success in the application of concept to object or intuition), is what Kant presents as the sublime and therefore, while the sublime may not always be in fashion, fashion is always in the sublime.

References

- Ahmed, O. (2016), 'Lumps and bumps at Comme des Garçons S/S97', *AnOther*, 5 January, <http://www.anothermag.com/fashion-beauty/8174/lumps-and-bumps-at-comme-des-garcons-s-s97>. Accessed March 2017
- Barnard, M. (2014), *Fashion Theory: An Introduction*, Abingdon: Routledge.

- Barthes, R. (1991), 'Erté, or *À la lettre*', *The Responsibility of Forms*, tr. Richard Howard, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 103–28.
- Bloom, H. (1994), 'Freud and the sublime: A catastrophe theory of creativity', in M. Ellmann (ed.), *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, London: Routledge, pp. 173–95.
- Burke, E. ([1756] 2015), *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crockett, C. (2001), *A Theology of the Sublime*, London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (1973), *Speech and Phenomena*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- _____ (1976), *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Freud, S. (1985), 'The uncanny', *Art and Literature* (trans. J. Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson), Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14, London: Penguin, pp. 335–76.
- Hegel, G. W. F. ([1835] 1975a), *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- _____ ([1835] 1975b), *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Heidegger, M. (1978), *Being and Time* (trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson), Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Kant, I. ([1781/87] 1929), *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. N. Kemp-Smith), London: MacMillan.

_____ ([1790] 1952), *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____ ([1797] 1967), letter to J. A. Lindbolm, 13 October, *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759–99* (trans. A. Zweig, ed. L. W. Beck), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Librett, J. S. (ed.), *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Loreck, H. (2002), 'De/constructing fashion/fashions of deconstruction: Cindy Sherman's fashion photographs', *Fashion Theory*, 6:3, pp. 255–76.

Magrì, E. (2016), 'A note on some contemporary readings of Hegel's master–servant dialectic', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 12:1, pp. 238–54.

Nancy, J.-L. (1993), 'The sublime offering', in J. S. Librett (ed.), *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 25–53.

_____ (2008), *The Discourse of the Syncope*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1968), *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale), Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Royle, N. (2003), *The Uncanny*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stafford, A. (2006), 'Clothes, fashion and system in the writings of Roland Barthes: "Something out of nothing"', in A. Stafford and M. Carter (eds), *The Language of Fashion: Roland Barthes*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 118–66.

Stafford, A. and Carter, M. (eds) (2006), *The Language of Fashion: Roland Barthes*, Oxford: Berg.

Wallace, W. (1901), *Kant*, London: William Blackwood and Sons.

Wilson, E. (1985), *Adorned in Dreams*, London: Virago.

Contributor details

Malcolm Barnard is senior lecturer in visual culture at Loughborough University. He has degrees in philosophy from the University of York and the University of Warwick and has published widely in the area of visual culture. His books include *Fashion as Communication* (Routledge, 2002), *Graphic Design as Communication* (Routledge,

2005), *Fashion Theory: A Reader* (Routledge, 2007) and *Fashion Theory: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2014).

Contact: School of Arts, English and Drama, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU, United Kingdom.

E-mail: m.barnard@lboro.ac.uk

Note

¹ Heidegger and Freud both use the German word *unheimlich*, which means unhomely, or not-homely, and this word gets translated into English as ‘uncanny’. In Heidegger’s work (1978: 233ff, H188–89) the idea of the uncanny or *unheimlich* has an ontological function: it is part of the description of how *Dasein*, or being there (Heidegger’s term for a more original and fundamental understanding of human being than is present in our everyday term ‘human being’) feels homeless or not at home in the world. In Freud’s writing (1985: 339ff) the idea of the uncanny has a psychoanalytic sense related to what arouses dread and horror in an individual as well as what is ‘not-homely’ in our experience. It is thus closely related to the notion of the sublime and people have investigated the relation between the sublime and the uncanny elsewhere (see Crockett 2001: 110; Bloom 1994; Royle 2003). This article is interested only in the ways in which certain elements of our experience and understanding of fashion and clothing raise the issue of the ‘inadequation’ of concept to object or intuition, and in whether and how this might be explained and understood as an instance of Kant’s sublime.