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Against *Kunstkonfektion*

Art and the Problem of Fashion in German Arts Criticism of the 1920s

The *Konfektionär* has to become an artist, and the artist has to become a *Konfektionär*!¹
Ernst Friedmann, *Der Weg zur deutschen Mode*, 1914/15

When architect Ernst Friedmann published his essay “Der Weg zur deutschen Mode” in the journal *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in the autumn of 1914, the First World War had just begun and the dependency of German fashion on Paris’s creative leadership came to be seen as a more serious problem. Up to that time, the German fashion industry had mainly produced derivative *Konfektion* (ready-to-wear) – simplified and adapted copies of original creations, commonly designed by couture ateliers in Paris (to a lesser degree in Berlin itself), in a range of qualities and at different price levels. Alongside a handful of other writers who had contributed statements on the topic, Friedmann argued that Germany’s industry did not have the artistic talent that had ensured Paris’s leading role for centuries. What concerned writers like Friedmann was not the lack of commercial success² but the dearth of authentic creativity. The only way to make German fashion more innovative and independent, and successful in the domestic market was to train art students in *Kunstgewerbeschulen* to create original fashion designs of higher quality, he believed. At the same time employees of German fashion houses should be given artistic training: the *Konfektionär* had to become an artist, and the artist had to become a *Konfektionär*.

What this article is concerned with is not the call for artists to be trained for the fashion industry, but rather the specific problem of a “lack of originality” identified above, and how this fundamental feature of the German ready-to-wear industry, which

1 “Der Konfektionär muss zum Künstler, und der Künstler zum Konfektionär werden.” Friedmann, Ernst (1914/1915): *Der Weg zur deutschen Mode*. In: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. 35, p. 102f. Architect Ernst Friedmann was also the founder of the *Verband Künstlerischer Schaufensterdekorateure* (Organization of Artistic Windowdressers). All translations from the German original are my own unless otherwise stated.

2 After growing rapidly in the late nineteenth Century, Germany was producing fashion goods with an estimated value of 53 trillion marks by 1913, representing 15 percent of all German exports, while France’s output was estimated at 40 trillion marks. Despite the reduction in exports during and immediately after the First World War, and as a result of the recession, the industry could regain its strength and expand into an international center for ready-to-wear clothing. See Guenther, Irene (2004): *Nazi Chic: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 80–81.

was essentially structural, became a metaphor employed by *art* critics to verbalize processes they believed to have observed in the *art* world, specifically in the production of painting. Through a close textual reading of articles published by a variety of writers in a range of art journals, a historically specific development in German arts criticism, that occurred between the mid-1910s and the early 1930s, will be retrieved: the use of Berlin's powerful ready-to-wear industry as a theme through which art writers could make visible the changes that had occurred in the way art was produced and commodified in an expanded marketplace. Some of such transformations had eluded them using their usual frame of reference (commonly shaped by art-historical training). By employing analogies to *Konfektion*, they could subject these issues to intellectual inquiry in a different way than had been done in earlier art-historical debates concerning the opposition between Fashion and Style.³ I will argue that with the avant-garde imperative on innovation there was a relatively new kind of pecking order in place in the art world, one which was based on time rather than on aesthetics or quality, similar to the order that characterized the fashion industry. In other words, this imperative had parallels with fashion as a structured, cyclical, industrial system, and art critics could therefore use references to *Konfektion*⁴ as shorthand for a specific kind of criticism that would be easily understood by their readers. I will then propose that, although not stated explicitly by the writers discussed here, the reference to the ready-to-wear industry – that is, Fashion as organized and strategic production rather than chaotic occurrence (the way it was conceptualized in art history) – was in fact employed as an *alternative* to the concept of Style as the dialectic “Other” of individual creative expression, thus causing the earlier distinction and critical dialectic.

3 As Frederic Schwartz has shown in his analysis of the concepts of Style and Fashion in the work of Heinrich Wölfflin and Theodor Adorno in *Blind Spots. Critical Theory And Art History in Twentieth Century Germany*, the roots of Adorno's thinking about mass culture go back to the *Kulturkritik* of the pre-war and interwar era. Schwartz, Frederic (2005): *Blind Spots. Critical Theory And Art History in Twentieth Century Germany*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press. The central point in his chapter on Fashion is that “the categories of art history have always been central to thinking about mass culture in Germany, from the rise of *Kulturkritik* to the Frankfurt School; and that this is because the crisis of culture accompanying the development of a modern consumer market was, in turn, inscribed within the analytic tools of the academic history of art,” (p. 1) such as in the work of art historian Heinrich Wölfflin. My research extends this line of thinking to argue that in the 1920s, industrialized fashion production specifically, i.e. *Konfektion*, became a trope employed as a critical tool within arts criticism (as opposed to art history), and that it functioned differently in this context compared to the way in which Fashion was engaged in earlier debates about Style.

4 In the English language, the verb “konfektionieren” is usually translated with “packaging” and refers to both the industrial process of streamlining distribution by breaking down products into identical units for packaging based on standardized measurements. Today it is used in media theory to describe the packaging of media content for easy consumption by a broad audience. However, its roots lie in the ready-to-wear fashion industry where it referred to standardised processes, from pattern-making, to sizing, and distribution.

tic between Style and Fashion to collapse. The use of the vocabulary of *Konfektion* in arts criticism occurred in tandem with an avoidance of the term “Style” and, I believe, thereby also indicated the perceived inadequacy of the terms and concepts provided by academic art history.

This article is about a specific way of thinking that emerged in *the discourse about painting* and occurred parallel to the unprecedented success of Berlin’s fashion industry, a way of thinking that largely disappeared again with the destruction of the largely Jewish German *Konfektion* industry by the Nazis in the 1930s. Before we have a closer look at this development in the art critical discourse, it is worthwhile, however, to consider how artists themselves engaged with the Berlin fashion industry, because evidence of a closer alignment between the two fields of cultural production would have made the structural similarities that art critics believed to have detected more obvious. Two popular exhibitions, staged in 1921 and 1926, will serve as examples and evidence for the breaking down of barriers between the “higher sphere” of art and the fashion industry as part of mass culture.

In September 1926, the exhibition *Das Frauenkleid in Mode und Malerei. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* opened in the atrium of the former Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseum in the Prinz-Albrecht Straße (fig. 1). It was organized by the *Lipperheidesche Kostümbibliothek* in Berlin together with the *Reichsverband der Deutschen Modeindustrie* and the *Reichsverband der Innungen für das Damenschneiderei-Gewerbe*. This exhibition seems to have had the support of some of the most prestigious Berlin institutions and figures of the art world, since, in the foreword of the small exhibition booklet, the curator and director of the *Lipperheidesche Kostümbibliothek* in Berlin, Dr. Wolfgang Bruhn, thanked Ludwig Justi, the esteemed director of the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen*, as well as the *Akademie der Künste* and the *Kronverwaltung* for lending paintings. The exhibition attracted a large audience and even the respected critic for the *Vossische Zeitung*, Max Osborn, found the exhibition concept, with its display of historical costumes next to portraits from the same era, to be “original.” He specifically praised the contemporary section, where fashion objects – “new creations of our best fashion houses” – could be found next to specially commissioned, “freshly painted portraits” of women wearing the same clothes, showing the designs “on the living model” so to speak, as very “effective” and “enjoyable.”⁵

Curator Bruhn also published an article in *Die Form*, the journal of the German *Werkbund*, in which he justified his exhibition concept, drawing on already established frameworks of academic and popular art history. An art historian by training, he explained that art and fashion equally expressed the character and style – the

⁵ Osborn, Max (1926): *Das Kostüm am “lebenden Modell.”* In: Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, no. 424, 8 September, p. 1. Among the participating contemporary painters were well-known figures such as Leo von König, Fritz Rhein, Willy Jaeckel, Georg Walter Rößner and Eugen Spiro.

A U S S T E L L U N G E N

Das Frauenkleid in Mode und Malerei

Wie das Wohnhaus den Geist und Charakter einer Zeit und ihrer Menschen in größeren Zügen wieder spiegelt, so zieht die Mode in ihrem Formenaufbau und ihren Schnitten, in der Oberfläche ihrer Stoffe, in der Wahl bestimmter Farben und Muster, in der Anwendung von Schmuckmotiven und modischen Zutaten die Einzelzüge der menschlichen Gesellschaft nach, die sie umhüllt. Die Mode, nicht nur die weibliche, als Ausdruck eines bestimmten Zeitstiles, einer einheitlich geformten Kultur, läßt sich durch lange Zeiträume deutlich verfolgen, nicht immer in reiner Übereinstimmung mit dem jeweiligen Zeitempfinden, sondern gelegentlich auch in eigenwilligem Widerspruch damit.

Die Septemberausstellung im ehem. Berliner Kunstgewerbe-Museum hat den Ausschnitt der letzten zwei Jahrhunderte als Anschauungsmaterial gewählt, um einmal den Werkstoff der Mode, das Originalkleid, das erst von dem beginnenden 18. Jahrhundert her in reicherer Auswahl erhalten ist, mit den Modedokumenten der entsprechenden zeitgenössischen Malerei in corpore zu konfrontieren. Auf solche Weise gewinnen wir ein geschlosseneres Bild, eine deutlichere Vorstellung von der äußeren Erscheinungsform, von dem Lebensgefühl und der Gesinnung einer Zeit; denn

eines ergänzt das andere: das tote Schneidermodell gewinnt Leben und greifbaren Zusammenhang erst durch die verstärkende oder auswahlende Darstellung des Malers, und andererseits vermag erst ein Vergleich mit dem Originalkleide dem Kenner sachlichen Anschluß über Konstruktion, Schnitt, Stoff, Farbe und Muster der gemalten Kleider zu geben.

Das Spätbarock um 1700 mit seinen steifen Kleidformen und prunkhaft schweren Stoffen und Mustern; der Regence-Stil, der auch in der Mode alle Formen leichter macht, die Farben und „Desins“ auflockert und aufhellt; das reife Rokoko mit seiner rundlich-volleren Bewegung, seinem Reichtum an Kontrasten im modischen Umriß, an Leuchtkraft der Farben und Glanz der stofflichen Oberfläche; das späte achtzehnte Jahrhundert in dem Überschwelen der Konturen nach den Seiten und in die Höhe, in der Häufung der Motive und der Freude an der Draperie. Gleichzeitig der Einfluß der Naturempfindung und des „sentiment“ einerseits sowie des Klassizismus auf der anderen Seite, die der Mode schon vor der französischen Revolution einen bürgerlich-gefühlvollen Zug und bald darauf einen antikisch-idealen Charakter geben. Schlanke Gestalten in durchsichtigen, leichten Gewändern mit flüssigen Umrissen verkörpern uns das Modeideal zu Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts. Doch das bürgerlich Behabige gewinnt rasch



Aus der historischen Abteilung

Fig. 1: Das Frauenkleid in Mode und Malerei. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, Exhibition, Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseum.

Zeitstil – of an epoch and influenced each other to their mutual advantage in form, color, and detailing. According to Bruhn, dress fashions were not always in harmony with the “will of a time” – the *Zeitwillen* – and it was only in combination with the painterly translation of fashion into art that one could gain a more complete picture of the spirit and mentality, the *Lebensgefühl* and *Gesinnung* of an era.⁶ Bruhn believed to have observed that the artists of his own time were “more in touch with fashion”⁷ than had previously been the case and proposed that the last room, which Osborn had particularly commended, with contemporary designs and their reproduction on canvas, would allow visitors to “come to their own conclusions as to whether and to what extent the same *Zeitgefühl* connects artists to today’s fashion.”⁸

The idea that all expressions of a culture were connected by the same experience and sensibility, evidenced by a coherent aesthetic, had been firmly established around the turn of the century with the publication of Alois Riegl’s study *Late Roman Art Industry* in 1901 (reprinted in 1923) and his concept of *Kunstwollen*. Art historian Sascha Schwabacher, a regular contributor to *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, followed Riegl’s line of thinking in his 1923 essay “Kunstströmungen” when writing somewhat vaguely that “art and fashion transmit their fluctuations to each other.”⁹ However, it is important to point out here that Bruhn’s exhibition concept in which fine art seemed to serve the fashion industry so directly, would not have been uncontroversial at the time.

From the late 1800s until the end of the First World War, Fashion as an abstract concept that stood for quick and constant change without logic or reason, had played the part of the dialectical “Other” in the discourse about a coherent Style of an era, in particular in debates about architecture and *Kunstgewerbe*.¹⁰ Although most elitist art journals simply ignored the 1926 exhibition, what they thought about it can perhaps be illustrated by Karl Scheffler’s response to a similar event staged in Berlin in 1921: the exhibition *Farbe und Mode* organized by the *Verband der Deutschen Mode-Industrie*, the *Interessengemeinschaft der deutschen Farbstoffindustrie* and the Akademie der Künste on Pariser Platz, curated by architect and designer Bruno Paul as part of the *Berliner Modewoche* (fig. 2). Scheffler, the editor of the respected art journal *Kunst*

6 Bruhn, Wolfgang (1926): *Das Frauenkleid in Mode und Malerei*. In: *Die Form*, vol. 1, no. 13, pp. 299–301, here p. 299.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 300.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

9 “Kunst und Mode übertragen sich in ihren Wallungen,” Schwabacher, Sascha (1923): *Kunstströmungen*. In: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. 27, no. 53, October, p. 61f., here p. 61.

10 For an in-depth analysis of the problem of fashion in the debates about style in architecture and craft around the turn of the century, see: Schwartz, Frederic (1996): *The Werkbund. Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.



Fig. 2: Berlin in 1921: the exhibition *Farbe und Mode* organized by the Verband der Deutschen Mode-Industrie, the Interessengemeinschaft der deutschen Farbstoffindustrie and the Akademie der Künste on the Pariser Platz, curated by architect and designer Professor Bruno Paul as part of the Berliner Modewoche.

und Künstler, condemned the whole event as a “travesty on fashion and time.”¹¹ This exhibition included a room with about two dozen painted portraits of fashionable women in contemporary dresses designed by leading Berlin fashion houses, commissioned from well-known painters. The result, according to Scheffler, was “non-artistic mixtures” of fashion and art. What was more, “the concept for this exhibition, the concept of commissions is itself non-artistic.”¹² And he concluded sarcastically: “One leaves the ‘Hall of Beautiful Women’ with the hope that in the future, the academy of arts and the *Verband der Deutschen Modeindustrie* would keep their distance from one another.”¹³

On the surface, the collaborations of the fashion industry, artists, and prestigious art institutions in 1921 and 1926 were an indicator of the raised status of the Berlin fashion industry as a cultural engine of the capital and one of the biggest and most important sectors of Weimar Germany’s economy. But, both exhibitions represented a challenge to the art world: they undermined the conception of the artwork’s own mode of being in the world, the modern rhetoric of art as autonomous and as the result of a free intellectual will. The dialectic at the root of the artwork demanded that art should overcome the conditions of its own production to emerge organically out of a logical line of historical development in order to appear perfect, pure, and complete. Now there was great cause for concern: many cultural commentators feared that the connection between art and fashion had gone far beyond the painting of fashionable women in exclusive couture dresses, unique clothes that could themselves be considered creative artefacts. These exhibitions were just one symptom of what many saw as the undermining of art at its root by capitalist consumer culture. In the 1920s, older concerns, rooted in the nineteenth century, that fashion could be something that *acted upon* the artwork – beyond the representation of fashionable artefacts and people – and that it could undermine the artwork’s ability to signify beyond the historical context of its creation, intensified. What was new was the emergence of *Kunstschriftsteller*¹⁴ for whom precisely the system of industrial ready-to-wear production and mass distribution that relied on the exploitation of artistic labor and inventiveness, *Konfektion* – not fashion in general – became representative. This system became a metaphor and analogy for developments that appeared to affect artistic production more widely. Here, the concern was no longer just about the issue of culture being subjected to short-lived trends, as in preceding debates, but

11 “Travestie auf Mode und Zeit,” Scheffler, Karl (1921): *Kunstaussstellungen: Farbe und Mode*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 19, p. 264f., here p. 265. He praises Lovis Corinth as having produced the most convincing portrait.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 265.

13 “Man verlässt den ‘Saal der schönen Frauen’ mit dem Wunsch, in Zukunft möchte die Akademie der Künste und möchte der Verband der Deutschen Modeindustrie hübsch für sich bleiben.” *Ibid.*, p. 265.

14 *Kunstschriftsteller* was the term most commonly used to describe art writers.

the increasing number of artists who seemed to be aligning themselves with a system of production that relied on duplication and appropriation for commercial success.

With the emergence of a mass audience for cultural products the demand for art as a form of status display and as an investment had increased, but at the root of the problem was that this could not be matched by a corresponding increase in artistic genius. Walter Benjamin would only deal with this issue in a note that accompanied his *Artwork-essay*, written in 1935. Benjamin cites Aldous Huxley who, in *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (1934), described a situation in which “the consumption of reading – and seeing – matter has far outstripped the natural production of gifted writers and draughtsmen.”¹⁵ In order to maintain Art as a meaningful critical category instead of dismantling it, the mass of individual paintings that did not meet the criteria for “true” art had to be filtered out and contained. Benjamin’s *Artwork-essay* charted the expansion of image reproduction from the graphic arts through to the contemporary multiplication of images by newspapers and illustrated magazines, and responded to the mechanical reproduction of artworks and the coinciding emergence of art “made for” reproduction. However, what the earlier texts, discussed in the following, were concerned with were not identical mechanical copies, but unique artworks that embraced a lack of originality and merely aimed to meet an already established contemporary taste – the *Zeitgeschmack* –, making both their motivation, aesthetics, and significance questionable. In both Berlin exhibitions, the paintings had not just been made-to-order, the distinguishing boundary between art and industrial processes was further undermined in another way: the original clothing designs that were *first* “promoted” by the artwork could *later* serve as models for mass-produced copies. And it was exactly this relationship between individual and unique creative expression (couture) as an antecedent and template for lower-quality, simplified copy (i.e. *Konfektion*) geared towards a mass-market that art critics used as a reference point to verbalize developments they believed to have observed in the art world.

Their concern was largely the result of the focus on the individual artist genius in art history, theory, and criticism. At the same time, aesthetic value was predicated on the identification of *Stil* in the wake of Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s organicist model of art history. But art in the modern era seemed to be increasingly defined by a multitude of individual personalities, artistic idioms, and accelerated cycles of innovation, resulting in the lack of a coherent Style. The fear started to take hold that much of contemporary artistic expression could be dismissed as a fleeting fashion by future art historians. If contemporary art, fashion, and mass culture were all conditioned by

15 Huxley, Aldous (1934): *Beyond the Mexique Bay. A Traveller’s Journal*. London, 1949, pp. 274. Quoted in Note 13 in: Benjamin, Walter (1936): *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In: Benjamin, Walter (1973): *Illuminations*, edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt, transl. by Harry Zohn. London: Fontana, p. 250. Based on the French version published in 1936 *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, V, following the first German publication in 1935.

short-lived phenomena and multiplicity, then, in order to keep art in a separate discursive sphere to mass culture, a new conceptual dialectic to replace that of Style vs. Fashion had to be found. Frederic Schwartz has argued that specifically in the debates of the *Werkbund* before the First World War, which focused on architecture and *Kunstgewerbe*, Fashion became “the central concept of [...] the decadent nature of visual form under conditions of *laissez-faire* capitalism,”¹⁶ but that the key figures in this discourse did not yet see the inherent contradictions “between the ‘personal work’ or ‘individual creation’ and the collective nature of Style,”¹⁷ which would only start to be acknowledged towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century in the *Werkbund*’s debates about “types” and copyright issues. The reality of industrial mass production was quickly eroding the value of the individually designed object for everyday use, and in these debates Fashion still stood for the negatively-framed problem of the multiplicity and the incoherence of an increased range of products made for a broad consumer base. In the discourse about fine art, the concept of *Style* had also become increasingly fraught, resulting in many writers who engaged with avant-garde developments in contemporary art avoiding it altogether. Style had come to represent a problematic art-historical model. Although, for some, it was merely an outdated term that could be replaced in the discourse in three ways: by the problem of “Isms,” by the concern about the inflationary use of new *Schlagworte*, and by the question whether an artwork was “appropriate for the time” (*zeitgemäss*). Like industrial reproduction, a Style or school in art relied on templates and models, leaders and followers, but at a time when novelty and the values of an avant-garde were so highly prized, painters who followed an established artistic idiom, one that already had the approval of critics, of institutional and private collectors, were in danger of being seen as no better than fashion’s *Konfektionäre*, who contributed to the homogenization of culture.

Art history and theory had for decades largely ignored contemporary art and most writers still believed that its merits could only be adequately assessed once it had become historical. They hoped that despite a perceived lack of a coherent style “a still unnamed, unknown, barely sensed style of great beauty” would be revealed once modernity had faded into the past – as the Austrian art critic Arthur Roessler reassured readers of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in his essay *Das ‘gute’ Alte und das ‘schlimme’ Neue* in 1927/28.¹⁸ What would turn out to have been only fashionable would eventually be thrown onto the “scrap heap of art and culture’s tat.”¹⁹ As suggested above, however, avant-garde artists and their supporters rejected such a con-

¹⁶ See note 10, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁸ Roessler, Arthur (1927): *Das ‘gute’ Alte und das ‘schlimme’ Neue*. In: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. 31, no. 1, October, p. 89f., here p. 89.

¹⁹ “Abfall des Kunst- und Kulturtrödels,” *ibid.* p. 89.

ception of a long-term, universal Style and the art-historical framework that defined it. Artist Iwan Puni, for example, dismissed “attempts of *grand-style*, a great static style, that only has the option to “perfect itself” as outmoded “utopian ideals, borrowed from the Middle Ages.”²⁰ A young generation of art critics, among them Carl Einstein, insisted on the artwork as a container of the “concrete singular.”²¹ Einstein contrasted the singular artwork with “the repetition of form or the anchoring of aesthetic experience in a stylistic grouping,”²² which he reconceptualized as being the result of “non-artistic influences.” According to Einstein, some of the worst offenders among artists had turned creative production into “a playground for monkeys who exercise with a stolen muscle; in that case art degenerates into idiotic reproduction.”²³ Einstein’s observation goes to the heart of the problem discussed here: the belief that the type of artist who used an established artistic formula in order to be successful in the marketplace had become more common than previously. Like in fashion – with its cycles of rise, expansion, and decline – new forms were first introduced at the top end of the hierarchy by a small number of artist geniuses, and a large group of – generally, but not necessarily – less talented opportunists turned the new idiom into a template, creating still individual but derivative works, thereby contributing to the trickling down of an aesthetic into lower stratum.

When Walter Benjamin identified the temporal dynamics that Fashion commanded as one of its most powerful and intriguing qualities in his *Passagenwerk*, written between 1927 and 1940, he was thinking like Charles Baudelaire before him of the positive, anticipatory qualities of the process fashionable clothing as artefact was caught in:²⁴

Each season brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of things to come. Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about legal codes, wars, and revolutions.²⁵

²⁰ Puni, Iwan (1923): *Die Kunst von heute*. In: *Das Kunstblatt*, vol. 7, no. 6, pp. 193–201, here p. 195.

²¹ “Das konkret Einzelne,” Einstein, Carl (1992): *Diese Aesthetiker verlassen uns*. In: *Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Haarmann, Hermann/Siebenhaar, Klaus. Berlin: Fannei and Waltz, pp. 194–221, here p. 216.

²² “Formwiederholung oder die Fixierung eines Gestalterlebnisses zur Stilgruppe,” *ibid.* p. 118.

²³ “Geradezu Sportplatz der Affen ist, die mit geklautem Muskel turnen; nun allerdings degeneriert Kunst zu idiotischer Reproduktion,” *ibid.* p. 218.

²⁴ For a detailed analysis of the role fashion played in the conception of modernity of Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Simmel see: Lehmann, Ulrich (2000): *Tigersprung. Fashion in Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Lehmann writes that Simmel was “the first to use a sartorial metaphor to exemplify modernity’s fragmented reality” (p. 135).

²⁵ Benjamin, Walter (1999): *The Arcades Project*. Transl. Eiland, Howard/McLaughlin, Kevin. Cambridge MA/London: Belknap, p. 64. Based on the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Suhrkamp).

Most interestingly, Benjamin did not just compare the anticipatory qualities of fashion and art as artefacts, but also the artist to the fashionable woman. Although fashion (as trend) had a stronger ability to anticipate the “things to come,” the fashionable woman was less sensitive to change than the artist:

Moreover, the sensitivity of the individual artist to what is coming certainly far exceeds that of the *grande dame*. Yet fashion is in much steadier, much more precise contact with the coming thing, thanks to the incomparable nose which the feminine collective has for what lies waiting in the future.²⁶

A difficult dichotomy is set up here. Women as a collective are, according to Benjamin, more in touch with the future than the female individual, but are superseded by the (male) artist. The fashionable *grande dame* could read the signs and anticipate the future better than the average person, but not as well as the artist. This reading of a fashionable woman’s skills will be returned to below. Even though fashion had a connection to “currents in art,” Benjamin believed, like most cultural critics before and after him, that the artwork had a core that emancipated it from fashion and (other) mass cultural products.²⁷ The problem for some art writers, however, lay elsewhere since – as suggested above – there were different types of artworks that they believed needed to be carefully differentiated. This also had to do with another quality of Fashion’s conception as an abstraction, described by Georg Simmel in his *Fashion*-essay of 1904 and later by Siegfried Kracauer in his 1925 essay “Dance and Travel.” Because of its indifference to form, Simmel had conceptualized Fashion as “the total antithesis of contents.”²⁸ Kracauer contended similarly, but more emphatically, that Fashion as an abstract process actively destroyed meaning: “Fashion effaces the intrinsic value of the things that come under its dominion by subjecting the appearance of these phenomena to periodic changes that are not based on any relation to the things themselves.”²⁹ Although Kracauer was writing here about fashionable dancing styles and foreign travel destinations, this crystalized what art critics feared: that the artwork, when subjected to an already established and popular artistic idiom, would be emptied of meaning and lose its value, its *Eigenwert*. For Kracauer, it was “the fickle dictates of fashion [that] disfigure the world”³⁰ since the actual type of dance and the destination of a holiday had become irrelevant, as long as it was a fashion-

26 *Ibid.*, p. 63f.

27 In his *Aesthetic Theory*, written in draft form between 1961 and 1969, Theodor Adorno for example assigned a temporal core (*Zeitkern*) to the artwork, which differentiated it from mass cultural products.

28 Simmel, Georg (1904): *Fashion*. In: *International Quarterly*, vol. 10, pp. 130–155. Reprinted in Purdy, Daniel (2004): *The Rise of Fashion. A Reader*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, here p. 298.

29 Kracauer, Siegfried (1925): *Dance and Travel*. In: *id.*: *The Mass Ornament*. Weimar. Essays. Transl. and ed. Levin, Thomas Y.; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 67.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

able one. Therefore, “the arbitrary tyranny of fashion allows one to conclude that the favorite movements of the season are not especially saturated with substance.”³¹ Could artworks that had become fashionable or – worse – been created strategically to serve popular taste still be considered to have substance? If not, then “true” art, in order to protect its privileged status, had to be differentiated from such objects, despite the fact that these were still unique, and to an extent original, works.

Architect and interior designer Michael Rachlis perhaps most directly formulated a new way of dividing cultural production into “true” art and its untrue “Other”: *Kunstkonfektion*. In his essay “Die Frage nach dem ‘Stil’,” published in *Innendekoration* in 1923, he employed the term “modern” as synonymous with popular and fashionable, writing that “forms become modern when they are *konfektioniert*,”³² and exclaimed:

Next to real art there will always be *Kunstmode*, *Kunstkonfektion*. Next to true artists ‘*Kunstkonfektionäre*,’ and it will always be a minority of people who can afford real art and not *Kunstkonfektion*; least of all those who do not see and feel the difference! Those will and should be served by *Kunstkonfektion* since *Kunstkonfektion* is more servile, gallant, strenuous and in any case more entrepreneurial than art. Nothing can be done about that!³³

The dialectic Rachlis set up here was directed at the artwork’s core and the causality of its surface aesthetics. Even though *Konfektion* differed from the exclusive, unique original it had copied, it was too similar to be the result of authentic creative expression. Standardization through templates with small variations was the condition for mass production – and homogenization, not just stylistic coherence, was its result.

The Konfektionierung of *Ecstasy*

Expressionism in particular was seen by many, inside and outside the art world, as a style that had invited too many “eloquent followers and pace-makers,”³⁴ too many *Mitläufer* and *Nachläufer*, as prominent art historian and curator Wilhelm von Bode complained in 1920. These artists, as the art critic Pawel Barchan wrote in 1922, “aim to deceive when they go along with the fashion, [when they] model a fashion.”³⁵ Inter-

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³² Rachlis, Michael (1923): *Die Frage nach dem ‘Stil’. Eine Antwort*. In: *Innendekoration*. Mein Heim, mein Stolz. Die gesamte Wohnungskunst in Wort und Bild, vol. 34, no. 1, p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁴ “Wortgewandte Mit- und Schrittmacher,” Bode, Wilhelm von (1920): *Die “Not der geistigen Arbeiter” auf dem Gebiet der Kunstforschung*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 18, no. 6, pp. 297–300, here p. 298.

³⁵ Barchan, Pawel (1922): *Die Rückkehr zu Ingres*. In: *Die Dame*, vol. 49, no. 10, pp. 5–8 and 12, here p. 5.

estingly, this prolific writer used the upmarket fashion magazine *Die Dame* – rather than an art journal – as his platform to contend provocatively that Expressionism had descended into a “*Konfektionierung*, a mechanization of ecstasy,” mere “kitsch.”³⁶ True artists, he claimed, were driven by inner need and desire, but now the “true representatives” of his epoch were those “ninety-nine percent” of modern artists he described as “the busy ones, dexterous ones, who don’t want to miss the boom.”³⁷ Barchan targeted an artist’s motivation rather than the outcome when complaining that the artistic “spirit” of his epoch was defined by artists who relied on “their ability to imitate, their entrepreneurial attitude, their ‘hard work,’ their craftiness, their opportunism.”³⁸ For Barchan, like for Einstein, only novelty and invention counted, since “a skilled artist can paint exactly like Matisse, exactly like Picasso.”³⁹

It is not by accident that Barchan named Picasso and Matisse as reference points. Picasso’s frequent stylistic changes (and the supposed influence of the fashionable revival of Ingres in his work) had – for some – been reason to question his motivation and his celebration as an artistic genius. Paul Westheim, the prominent editor of *Das Kunstblatt*, felt compelled to address such claims by arguing in 1922 in his essay “Kunst in Frankreich. L’Esprit” that Picasso’s constant style changes could in fact be a conscious strategy to escape fashion:

When looking for an explanation why Picasso paints this way or that, the so-called ‘Ingress-Fashion’ is probably the most stupid and most easily refutable. [...] Picasso, it seems to me, would have an easier time creating a ‘Picasso-Fashion.’ Perhaps the motivation behind his attempts is the intention to avoid a ‘Picasso-Fashion.’⁴⁰

An artist had to innovate constantly in order to be ahead of the *Kunstkonfektionäre* who were looking for market success by applying an aesthetic which he, the true artist, had already successfully introduced. Westheim’s assessment reveals the increased instability of aesthetic judgment within specialist circles, and of what role quality could play when lineage and change had become such central categories. Critics still continued to use the established accusation “follower of fashion” to criticize any artist they did not rate, even artists who were widely respected among the elite of the art world. Karl Scheffler was clearly no fan of Fernand Léger, since he dismissed Léger-paintings shown at Alfred Flechtheim’s gallery in 1928 as “crafted

³⁶ “Eine Mechanisierung der Ekstase,” *ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁸ “Ihre Nachahmungsfähigkeit, ihre Geschäftigkeit, ihre ‚Tüchtigkeit‘, ihre Fixigkeit, ihre Konjunkturhascherei,” *ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Westheim, Paul (1922): *Kunst in Frankreich. L’Esprit*. In: *Das Kunstblatt*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 8–25, here p. 15.

calculations,” and the exhibition as “old-fashioned, not ground-breaking; the artist is a follower of an outdated fashion.”⁴¹ Léger had become his own *Konfektionär*.

Carl Einstein also diagnosed the problem of an increase in the number of painters who merely applied an existing formula when writing sarcastically in the *Kunstblatt* in February 1923:

One has had enough of the peasant brother-in-laws of Gauguin and van Gogh drunk on color. [...] [These artists can now only] excite remote girls' chambers, or gather dust in the back corridors of middling *Konfektionäre*.⁴²

By the early 1920s, it had become fashionable to find Expressionism unfashionable. For Einstein, what undermined art was not a lack of longevity and coherence, quite the opposite: longevity and coherence were the problem that contributed to a lack of originality (and therefore quality), and resulted in products that could not even be sold by average ready-to-wear makers anymore. Dynamics necessary to constitute a style or even a school were dismissed. As Niklas Luhmann has argued, a new artwork that fits into an existing style plays with “similarities and difference,” it must “deviate from existing examples of a style but reformulate it” through what he called “recursive reconstruction.”⁴³ But Einstein would not have it: what others might describe as aesthetic congruence, for him was an unnecessary tautology. What lay at the heart of the fashion industry and of *Konfektion* were such processes of recursive reconstruction. They helped to introduce and disseminate new styles in gradual stages and to sell clothes to a mass audience. In art, these processes undermined the credibility of the autonomous creative subject.

Among the commentators using industrial fashion production as an analogy was also Karl Scheffler, who attested in 1923 during the hyper-inflation that the “old members of the Freie Sezession update their display in an Expressionist manner, pay their tribute to the younger way of seeing, and arrange the cut of the dress according to the fashion of the day.”⁴⁴ Even previously celebrated artists and innovators could

⁴¹ Scheffler, Karl (1928): *Ausstellungen*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 26, no. 6, p. 241. Scheffler, a strong supporter of Impressionist and Expressionist art, negatively reviewed a number exhibitions at Flechtheim's gallery.

⁴² “Man ist der farbtrunkenen Bauernschwäger Gauguins und van Goghs satt. Genug der dionysischen Anstreicher; die offiziellen, ehrenhaften Neffen Matissens mögen in kleinpummelige Provinz retirieren....; bescheiden mögen diese belanglosen Ausreden abgelegene Mädchenkammern erregen oder in den hinteren Korridoren mittlerer Konfektionäre verstauben.” Einstein, Carl (1923): *Otto Dix*. In: *Das Kunstblatt*, vol. 7, pp. 97–102, here p. 97.

⁴³ Luhmann, Niklas (2000): *Art as a Social System*. Transl. Knodt, Eva M.. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 131 (German original: id. (1997): *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp).

⁴⁴ “Die alten Mitglieder der freien Sezession frischen ihren Vortrag expressionistisch auf, sie bringen der jüngeren Sehform ihren Tribut dar und richten den Schnitt des Kleides ein wenig nach der Mode

succumb to fashion's dynamics if their work was losing public interest. The fear of "going-out-of-fashion" was therefore identified as another potential driving force at the root of an artwork's aesthetics. The art world was perceived to have assimilated too many processes from the industrial world of fashion. In 1932, the painter Annot Jacobi claimed in *Kunst und Künstler* that the state of the art world was now such that some artists grew tired of their own work parallel with its going out of fashion, and that they were directed entirely by external factors in their creative practice. Jacobi deliberately employed business vocabulary when writing: "When the producer is disgusted by his own work, because it is not 'dernier cri' anymore and because he is tired of it, he travels to Paris for the new season like every milliner. Artists call that 'transformation.'"⁴⁵

This was not meant as a spike directed at French art in the context of a rise of nationalism. Jacobi's criticism used Paris's dominant position within the Western fashion system to draw parallels to artistic positions that did not deserve critical approval because they were not as innovative as they pretended to be. Instead, she called for a painter who "rejects *Konfektion* [...] who stands on his own feet instead of on stilts [...] who is not fishing for cheap success."⁴⁶ Jacobi questioned the legitimacy of such work (without naming specific artists) because its production was based on duplication and dilution. Loss of exclusivity and originality through the rise of ready-to-wear had allowed fashion's democratization: but in the art world it threatened the legitimacy of the product itself. An artwork's power relied on its ability to have an effect on the viewer and his ways of seeing or thinking, and this effect was dependent on an element of surprise. Jacobi accused her contemporaries of artificially cultivating the habitus of an independent artistic subject when, in fact, external hierarchies and processes directed their output.

Art Collector, Art Market, and *Grand Dame*

In 1916, a writer in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* echoed the well-established concerns that *Zeitgeschmack*, taste and fashion, always demanded "certain concessions and restrictions" and could prevent artists from realizing some of their ideas: "a sacrifice that some make without grasping its

des Tages." Scheffler, Karl (1923): *Die Ausstellung der Freien Sezession*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 21, pp. 211–218, here p. 212.

⁴⁵ "Wenn den Produzenten seine Ware anwidert, weil sie nicht mehr 'dernier cri' und er ihrer überdrüssig ist, dann fährt er wie jeder Modist zur neuen Saison nach Paris. Bei Malern heißt das 'Wandlung'." Jacobi, Annot (1932): *Klischee Braque*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 31, no. 7, pp. 246–250, here p. 249.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

magnitude.”⁴⁷ With the French Revolution, the artist’s position in society had been redefined, but as a free agent within a bourgeois capitalist economy he had not been liberated. He had become “a plaything of the whims of the masses,” as writer S.S. Birr summarized in 1923 in the *Kunstblatt* in his essay “Kunst, Künstler, Kunstkonsument. Das bürgerliche Zeitalter.”⁴⁸ However, the hyper-inflation had made the economic and social factors that conditioned an artist’s work even more difficult to ignore than previously – although the rhetoric that mythologized both the process of creation and the artist as genius still dominated the wider discourse. For Birr, the central problem was the “de-personalization” of the art collector who “picks whatever appeals to his momentary inclination [...] from an existing production.”⁴⁹ Again, this was not a particularly new insight, but key to this enquiry is that Birr employed the system of clothing production to exemplify the effect: “It is the difference between *Konfektion* and the tailored suit, fitted to one’s body. A conversation with the artist.”⁵⁰ Birr eschewed any traditional, clichéd notions that romanticized the artwork’s relationship to the world when claiming that the majority of “art production had to become speculation” since the artist had to try to “capture what would sell”⁵¹ when conceiving a new work. Acting like any other consumer, the art collector had unprecedented influence because he “encouraged certain productions with his acquisitions and made others fail with his rejection.”⁵² Because of this influence, Birr believed that an art collector needed to acquire specific skills, intellectual capacities that fashionable women (with sufficient funds) already had. As Walter Benjamin had argued, only an artist had more of a sense of the future than the fashionable *grande dame*, but Birr contended that she was certainly more skilled in making aesthetic decisions than the collector, based on a combination of personal taste, engagement with visual culture, and foresight:

Today’s consignor [...] completely fails where individual volition, an act of definite decision-making is required. This ability to anticipate, the foundation of the process of ordering, is a skill – which, by the way, the woman who orders a dress after her own taste from a dressmaker certainly has – he entirely lacks.⁵³

47 Ameseder, Rudolf (1916): *Besprechungen*. In: *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemein Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 78–80, here p. 79.

48 “Einem Spielball der Massenlaunen,” Birr, S. S. (1923): *Kunst, Künstler, Kunstkonsument. Das bürgerliche Zeitalter*. In: *Das Kunstblatt*, vol. 7, pp. 232–243, here p. 234. Karel Teige referenced Birr’s text in his essay on the art market to make a similar point. See: Teige, Karel (2000): *Le Marché de l’art*. Paris: Éditions Allia, p. 24 (Czech original: id. [1936]: *Jarmark Umění*. Prag: F. J. Müller).

49 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 242.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Traditional dressmaking, the made-to-measure processes, the collaboration between dressmaker and client, is contrasted with the artwork as a ready-made consumer good. Simmel had contended in his *Fashion*-essay of 1904 that women had a much closer connection to fashion since they had to use dress as one of their few options for self-expression, and Birr makes his point based on the same assumption. Fashionable women had thereby developed the ability to gauge what would be desirable and “appropriate” in the immediate future. Ulrich Lehmann has argued that Simmel had hoped it would be possible “to counter the anti-individual dominance of prêt-à-porter clothing and return to subjective made-to-measure practice [...] to achieve a creative correspondence between the erstwhile estranged subject and object.”⁵⁴ Transposed into the art context of the 1920s, the issue of made-to-measure vs. prêt-à-porter did not just highlight the problem of alienation between the subject and her or his clothing as consumer object; it was the perfect metaphor to highlight a lack of creative correspondence in the relationship between art collector and off-the-peg artworks, too.

The number of surveys conducted on the art market in the 1920s is evidence of a deepening concern regarding the artist as agent within an open marketplace. In 1928, the periodical *Der Kunstwanderer* published the results of its investigation into the relationship between artists and the contemporary art trade under the header “Künstler und moderner Kunsthandel. Eine Enquête, II.” Among the respondents was the painter Otto Marcus who had co-founded the *Zentrale Künstlervertretung*, an organization to represent artists, in 1921. He diagnosed that the art market had moved into two extreme directions:

The rarity of a work makes it subject to financial speculation. [...] The other extreme is the trade with mass commodities. Court cases have shown that poor artists have to ‘deliver’ two or more paintings a day for a few Marks, which are then shifted by employing large marketing campaigns and through auctions on high streets and in seaside resorts.⁵⁵

The economic conditions under which artistic labor was performed, and how they impacted on the ideological value of the creative output, were coming more and more into focus. With the rise of a mass society and its growing influence over cultural production – amplified by a greatly expanded number of media outlets – the way a significant number of individual works were now made undermined Art’s special status. *Kunstkonfektion* as a concept provided – for some – a tool through which one could negotiate, and hoped to establish, boundaries between art for the masses, as described by Marcus, and “significant” art. The question that remained, however, was how this could be squared with the popular appeal of painters like Picasso or Matisse.

⁵⁴ See note 24, p. 136.

⁵⁵ Marcus, Otto et al. (1928): *Künstler und moderner Kunsthandel. Eine Enquête. II.* In: *Kunstwanderer*, vol. 10, no. 1/2, 1928, pp. 240–246, here p. 241.

The *Konfektionierung* of Culture

Art conceived as *Konfektion* captured a deeper issue, and this problem was most pronounced in the capital Berlin, it was believed. According to an annoyed Kurt Tucholsky, writing in 1927 in the influential leftist weekly *Die Weltbühne* under his pseudonym Ignaz Wrobel, Berlin had “invented the collective interest,” and in tandem with a “uniformity of thinking [which is] developed to a life-threatening degree in the Germans” this had created a specific urban type of bourgeois: “*Konfektion* their interior life, factory product their individuality, machine-made with the imitated signifiers of craft.”⁵⁶ By the 1930s, the verb *konfektioniert* was repeatedly employed by a range of prominent authors, in particular in *Die Weltbühne*, as a cipher to describe the “dumbing down” of cultural production in general. Adolf Behne complained in 1930 that the architecture of Neues Bauen was being turned into mere “*Konfektion*.”⁵⁷ The same problem was diagnosed in film at a time when the so-called *Konfektionsfilm* – a film set in the ready-to-wear industry in Berlin – was one of the most popular film genres. Béla Balázs, for example, identified in 1931 that “konfektionierte Stimmungen”⁵⁸ – ready-made moods – were characteristics of “kitsch” in music and film. In 1932, Rudolf Arnheim accused big production companies, whom he described as “*Konfektionäre*,”⁵⁹ to be responsible for a decline in the quality of films, and he was seconded by Ernst Kállai who contended that “true film art needs to be clearly distinguished from *Konfektion*.”⁶⁰ The *Weltbühne*’s theatre critic Harry Kahn, in turn, pointed the finger at “our speedy *Konfektionäre*” and “Berliner opportunists” who had appropriated Alexander Tairov’s innovative theatrical language to the extent that it had become “staple stock.”⁶¹

The idea of the “packaging” of culture and the concept of the repetition of intellectual content, of pseudo-individuality, would later form the core of Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of the *Kulturindustrie* in the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, first published in 1944, but with a focus on mass media production and consumption as subjected to a dialectic from which the artwork could still be exempt. In his essay *On Jazz* of 1938, Adorno had already argued that jazz music merely suggested immediacy through “seemingly improvisational moments [...] [that] are added in their naked

56 Wrobel, Ignaz (1927): *Die Parole*. In: *Die Weltbühne*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 23–25, here pp. 23 and 25. Tucholsky edited this edition and then continued to work for the magazine as assistant editor.

57 Behne, Adolf (1930): *Werner Scholz*. In: *Die Weltbühne*, vol. 26, no. 49, p. 840.

58 Balázs, Béla (1930): *Der Film des Kleinbürgers*. In: *Die Weltbühne*, vol. 26, no. 32, pp. 232–236, here p. 235. Preview extract from Balázs’s book *Der Geist des Films*.

59 Arnheim, Rudolf (1931): *Post Scriptum*. In: *Die Weltbühne*, vol. 27, no. 16, p. 584–586, here p. 586.

60 Kállai, Ernst (1932): *Zweimal Bauen im Film*, In: *Die Weltbühne*, p. 146f., here p. 147.

61 “Berliner Umlerner,” Kahn, Harry (1928): *Russisch-jüdisches Theater*. In: *Die Weltbühne*, vol. 24, no. 16, pp. 609–611, here p. 609.

externality to the standardized commodity character in order to mask it.”⁶² And when Helmut Plessner considered the market for avant-garde art in 1965, he similarly still believed modern art to be able to stay insulated to a certain extent from the market mechanisms of Fashion, since “the trade with the Emperor’s New Clothes does not just comply with the sales need of great fashion houses and of *Konfektion*.”⁶³

Perhaps one could even argue that in 1920s art criticism, the concept of Fashion as *Konfektion* functioned in some ways like the art historical concept of the *Spätstil*: it described a phase in which a Style was in decline and widely established. In art history since Winkelmann, it provided a narrative of corruption. While the concept of a *Spätstil*, however, described an organic process of decline, *Kunstkonfektion* signified art produced within the historic parameters of a fully industrialized society and caught in new mechanisms that contaminated art. A *Spätstil* and *Kunstkonfektion* had different causes and different teleologies, but the parallels become evident when considering what the young Austrian art historian and pupil of Alois Riegl, Hans Tietze, wrote in 1925 in his programmatic study *Die Krise der Kunst und der Kunstgeschichte*. When a style had passed its zenith, he argued, “form will continue to grow following the direction of the last impulse it received, without inner direction, given over to a playful will to live.”⁶⁴ What Tietze described here is what art critics tried to capture using the mechanisms of *Konfektion*: the impulse that came from the authentic artistic genius being used as a mere template to capitalize on the market demand created by the original clothing design or artwork. Rather than describing a process entirely internal to art, Tietze also related this to its external reception when writing: “For an artistic idiom to be engaged as a decorative form, either its intellectual content has to have turned into common knowledge, or the artist has to have the power to impose his vision without any resistance on the spectator’s part.”⁶⁵ Although they were not the result of the same level of disenchantment, in this statement Tietze anticipated the idea of the repetition of intellectual content and of pseudo-individuality that Adorno and Horkheimer later fully developed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in their chapter on the cultural industry.

The art writers discussed in this chapter were, in contrast, trying to articulate that under the surface of a unique painting, made by an individual artist, there could

62 Adorno, Theodor (1938): *On Jazz*. In: *Discourse*. Transl. Daniel, Jamie Owen, vol. 12, no. 1, 1989/90, pp. 45–69, here p. 48.

63 Plessner, Helmut (1965): *Über die gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen der modernen Malerei*. In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 1–15, here p. 15.

64 “So wächst die Form der Richtung des zuletzt empfangenen Impulses gehorchend weiter, ohne inneren Trieb, einem spielerische Lebensdrang überlassen,” Tietze, Hans (1925): *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft. Die Krise der Kunst und der Kunstgeschichte*. Vienna: Krystall, p. 29.

65 Tietze named the expressionist work of Emil Nolde as an example that had in 1925 become a decorative style, a *Schmuckstil*.

be a product that was not individual and unique at all. Such works relied on what Adorno would describe in the following decade in his essay on jazz music as “standardized improvisation.” In *Kunstkonfektion* the relationship between elements of production and reproduction had lost the delicate balance necessary for organic style development in true art: *Kunstkonfektion* was to a higher degree reproduction than production – if one took a closer look. An artwork that was *Konfektionsware* could not achieve what Carl Einstein formulated as the defining characteristic of a true artwork: the ability to stand outside existing categories, terms, and ways of thinking – to offer “de-signification of the world,” a “chance for freedom,” and – most importantly – the “destruction of continuity.”⁶⁶ Ready-to-wear, the modified copy of a couture-original, relied on continuity, measured evolution, and predictable market success. Translated into the art context, *Konfektion* was what art historian Hans Tietze had described in 1917 as “talentless imitations, which turn what is valuable in the original into something easy to digest by broad swathes of society.”⁶⁷

The Art Critic

The art writer had become “the guide for a mass of value-blind people,”⁶⁸ as Fritz Hoerber contended in 1921 in *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, calling for the establishment of a university degree in arts criticism. He believed that only the “intuition of the art critic [...] that surveys the whole culture of our time synthetically” could identify what exactly could be understood to be the “fulfillment of the Zeitwillen.”⁶⁹ This could only be achieved by that art critic who “is constantly actively involved, who does not separate and specialize himself like the academic.”⁷⁰ The art journal was one of the platforms at the art critics’ disposal and in some way it functioned like a fashion magazine. As the art journal *Kunst und Künstler* explained in 1927, the fashion journal’s role was to evaluate the new designs shown in Paris and to promote only a selection of them through debate, drawings, and photographs to “try to provide a more specific image of the future.”⁷¹ By validating certain artists, the art journal had a similar task and an effect on what galleries and museums would

66 “Entsinnung der Welt,” Carl Einstein, see note 20, p. 220.

67 “Talentlose Nachahmungen, die das Wertvolle des Vorbildes breiten Schichten mundgerecht machen.” Tietze, Hans (1917): *Die Literatur über jüngste Kunst*. Reprinted 1925, see note 64, p. 89.

68 “Führerin einer Menge von Wertblinden,” Hoerber, Fritz (1921): *Sachliche Kunstbetrachtung*. In: *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 205–211, here p. 207.

69 “Die Gesamtkultur unserer Zeit synthetisch umspannt,” *ibid*, p. 207.

70 *Ibid*, p. 207.

71 “Ein genaueres Bild der Zukunft zu geben versucht.” (s. n.) (2007): *Moden-Schau*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 78f., here p. 78.

display, collectors would buy, and other artists might produce – therefore shaping future artistic expression. The art critic therefore needed skills similar to those of the fashion designer: to be able to identify what was really new, to read what Benjamin had called the “secret signals of things to come.” As Sascha Schwabacher wrote (although somewhat dismissively) in 1923 in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*: “There are sniffer dogs of [art] criticism who, like a good tailor, feel the new direction of fashion in their fingertips before the season has started, and who praise or condemn it accordingly.”⁷² The problem with art critics was that they could directly influence audience response and undermine the independence of artistic vision.

In addition, there was a growing awareness that even the vocabulary employed in writing about art influenced its reception and categorization. An artwork could benefit or suffer from being included in a particular terminological bracket. The art historian interested in contemporary art was advised to be careful. In 1900, Georg Galland, who contributed a chapter on painting in Paul Kraemers ambitious book project *Das XIX. Jahrhundert in Wort und Bild*, had already warned:

The historian has to be careful not to describe every new direction in art as a significant phase in its development; [...] without being explicit, even the tone of the account and a more eloquent engagement with the latest fashion can prompt such a perception.⁷³

Even though an artwork was typically attributed to a school or style as a mark of critical approbation, the categorization into an existing Style had come to be seen as dangerous by some writers who supported innovative avant-garde positions. Style, one had come to acknowledge, was not a value-free parameter, particularly in its relationship to time. In 1920, Curt Glaser, a supporter of new artistic positions as collector and critic, warned in *Kunst und Künstler* against the use of a “carelessly coined word” and in particular against the “preconceived opinion contained in the concept of style,” calling instead for “linguistic precision.”⁷⁴ It was not necessarily the artwork itself, but the vocabulary employed by art writers that flattened difference – preventing an artwork from destroying continuity. Einstein described this process as “death by conceptualization”⁷⁵: “One tries to unify the mass of signs, meaning one reduces the amount of appearances and the threatening concrete experiences. To achieve this one adapts the unknown or new to fit with the already known.”⁷⁶

72 “Es gibt Spürhunde der Kritik, die wie ein guter Schneider die Entwicklung der Mode schon vor der Saison in den Fingerspitzen fühlen und in diesem Zeichen preisen und verdammen.” Sascha Schwabacher, see note 6, p. 61.

73 Galland, Georg (1900): *Malerei und Plastik*. In: Kraemer, Hans (ed.): *Das XIX. Jahrhundert in Wort und Bild*, vol. 3. Berlin et al.: Bong, p. 303.

74 Glaser, Curt (1920): *Die neue Graphik*. In: *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 53–, here p. 55f.

75 “Todesprozess durch Verbegrifflichung.” Carl Einstein, see note 20, p. 204.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

The language of art writing itself could be subject to *Konfektionierung*, as suggested in different words by Einstein. But while this process of *Verbegrifflichung* into a stylistic category could be damaging to artworks that were actually innovative, it is what the deployment of the concept of *Konfektion* in art writing was actually meant to do: to unify a type of art that needed to be separated from “true” art to maintain Art as a category. The habit of forming “Isms” in particular to categorize movements was regularly made responsible for a problematic stylistic packaging of artworks. One author in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* speaks of the “pressure of *Schlagworte* [slogans] and programs believing a style can be distilled through enforcement.”⁷⁷ Niklas Luhmann would later highlight the temporal aspect by defining Style as a form “that processes the burden of innovation and along with it the temporality of all forms while casting a secret glance toward an eternal life beyond its own time.”⁷⁸ But the avant-garde rhetoric of the exceptional, independent artist genius ran counter to this, it exacerbated the “burden of innovation”, and in the context of accelerated change, a painter or sculptor who did not navigate the system of stylistic choice, including its temporal dynamics, carefully enough could risk being labeled a *Kunstkonfektionär*.

The engagement of the term *Konfektion* in the writing about art is common enough to signal a change and the setting up of a new dialectic as a boundary between art deserving or undeserving of critical attention and of a place in art history. The fashion industry had started to occupy such a dominant position in society and culture that it seemed, to some, a suitable model for thinking about processes and patterns of change and stasis within the art world, about creative production that could not be captured and considered within existing art historical frameworks. Although the term *Kunstbetrieb* had already emerged in the 1800s, a full discourse on its qualities as an organizational mechanism was still underdeveloped. *Kunstkonfektion* described in one word several interconnected processes: the temporal dynamics of fashion, high volume production, the engagement of a broad consumer base, and a diversion from the teleology of modern art through repetition, which prevented emancipation.

The effort to understand the increasingly converging processes of capitalist mass culture and art production shifted the focus away from art historical theories concerned with the interpretation and formalist analysis of an artwork’s aesthetics, and from the conceptualization of art as the result of an exclusively internal dialogue with art history. It is evidence of a shift in the thinking about artistic labor, artistic habitus, and processes at the root of the artwork itself. What was at stake was the fetish character of the autonomous artwork, faced with market forces that required assimilation to a system not based on self-realization, but marginal differentiation, on the recur-

77 Pfister, Kurt (1925/26): *Paul Elsas – München*. In: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. 29, no. 57, pp. 257–259, here p. 257.

78 Luhmann, Niklas (2000): *Art as a Social System*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 132. (German original: id. (1995): *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.)

sive application of formulas: a program of imitation, standardization, and multiplication. *Konfektion* as a classificatory device and organizational model could make this new nexus between art and mass society more accessible to reason.

For the writers discussed here, the reference to *Konfektion* – that is, Fashion as organized and strategic production rather than chaotic occurrence – could thereby replace the concept of Style as the dialectic “Other” of individual creative expression. The *Konfektions*-model of Fashion seemed to crystalize processes responsible for a lack of individuality in fine art and, therefore, it had in fact more in common with the concept of Style than the previous one-dimensional conceptualization of Fashion as short-lived, incoherent, and individualized. Its emergence in the critical writing about art represents a parallel development, and indicates a turn in the dominant discourse, a kind of reversal of the established dialectic that had defined the *Werkbund* debates before the war. Now, more than anything, temporality – rather than quality – mattered: the true artist had to be ahead of the curve. Style and *Fashion as Konfektion* were now on the same side, the old dialectic had collapsed. Individual artistic expression was thereby liberated from Style, since any stylistic coherence could now be framed negatively as fashionable *Kunstkonfektion* and as the opposite of authentic art.