

МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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**Fashion and the Question of the Symbolic:
The Ideology of Value and Its Limits***E. V. Vasilyeva*

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Questions of the symbolic occupy one of the central places in the structure and concept of fashion. The system of the symbolic — obscure, not always lending itself to identification and definition — forms the basis of fashion as a mechanism focused upon inversion and acceptance of a conventional system of values. The ideology of the symbolic, founded on the establishment of symbolic values is of direct relevance to an understanding of the system of fashion. The symbolic holds a central position in the establishment of a system of values. It constructs the rich content of the semantic vector of fashion. The artistic, visual and content platform of fashion is built on the basis of the symbolic. This conception was outlined by Jacques Lacan, and then developed further by such figures as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu. Existing in a variety of statuses and supporting a whole range of basic programmes — shaping concepts of the authentic, defining mechanisms of exchange and significance, denoting the boundaries of the social field — the symbolic maintains and determines the visual and semantic rules of fashion. This paper examines the main theories of the symbolic associated with the formation of the ideological and artistic programme of fashion.

Keywords: fashion theory, symbol, symbolic, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu.

The phenomenon of fashion is connected in many ways with the concept of ideological influence and symbolic domination. The exploration of this rich foundation of meaning became one of the themes within fashion studies in the 20th century [1; 2]. Fashion is bound up with the concept of semantic dominance. It can be seen as a form of ideological power. At the same time, while it is the de facto basis for the programme of fashion, the

system of the symbolic and of symbolic power has only been studied in an extremely fragmentary manner. The phenomenon of the symbolic and its system have been recognized as key elements in the concept of fashion, yet they remain to this day on the periphery of academic discussion or have been excluded from analytical constructs. The aim of the present paper is to examine the main theories associated with the development of the concept of the symbolic and also to trace the dynamics of the evolution of such ideas.

The Reverse Side of the Symbolic: Lacan

The development of the concept of symbolic power can be correlated with the analytical space of the 1960s–1970s. That period saw the publication of several major works in which the idea of symbolic dominance became the basis for the structure of the research. The introduction of the concept of symbolic dominance can be linked to the theory of power *per se* and with the fundamental shift in ideas about its nature that took place in the 1960s. The change in the theory of power is associated with the concepts advanced by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu. It forms an integral part of Foucault's concept of power [3], the ideological base in Deleuze and Guattari's model of distributed power [4], an element in Baudrillard's programme of symbolic exchange [5] and the foundation of Bourdieu's social field system [6].

In the 1960s, there was a fundamental change in the understanding of the model of power imagined as a system of ideological domination. The concept of disciplinary limitation, which was the prevailing model until that time, gave way to the idea of power as a system of relationships. Its participants find themselves in a position of subordination or dominance and take part in the creation of a system of influence. This model, clearly adopted from Lacan [7], exerted a marked influence on the whole of French philosophy and social theory. For Lacan, the concept of power is firmly bound up with the theory of personality [8]. The subjective inner Self is constantly establishing relations with some external Other, and that connection is, as a rule, made through interactions of dominance and subservience. Power, as Lacan sees it, is a dialogical phenomenon with the purpose of instituting a particular discourse. For him, power is a narrative practice associated with the establishment of this or that ideological form. Lacan was one of the first to being to regard power as a phenomenon of a symbolic order.

Lacan is considered to have outlined the basis of his concept of the Symbolic in what is conventionally referred to as his “Discours de Rome” or “Rapport de Rome” presented in the wings of a conference at the University of Rome's Institute of Psychology in September 1953 [9]. The text became known as an independent work under the title “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” that was repeatedly republished and translated into many languages, including Russian. Shortly before the “Discours de Rome”, in June 1953, Lacan gave a lecture entitled “The Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real” that identified the main concepts associated with the construct of the Symbolic [10]. The idea of the Symbolic also occupies a central place in Lacan's later works — in particular, it is considered to be the main one in the unfinished 1963 seminar on the “Names of the Father” [11]. The idea of the Symbolic is a thread that runs through many of Lacan's writings — in part people correlate the concept with Claude Lévi-Strauss's “Elementary Structures of Kinship” (1949) [12] and “Symbolic Efficiency” (1949) [13] (the latter is included in “Structural Anthropology”, published in 1958).

In the works of both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, the programme of the Symbolic is connected with the idea of a cultural order and the system of language [14]. The Symbolic is one of the essential foundations of human thinking and personality. Lacan viewed the Symbolic as an element that determined the order of the subject. The Symbolic can be seen as a system of distinctions that permit the demarcation of the Self and the Other. Lacan presents the space of the Symbolic as markers of speech and action. The principal position formulated by Lacan is that the Symbolic is the main marker of difference. The recognition of an element as Symbolic is a recognition of its Otherness. Differences are positioned, perceived and acknowledged through symbols. This process would come to be identified as central to the mechanism for establishing symbolic power and for the mechanism of fashion, which we can consider as one of the forms of symbolic power.

The Instance of the Letter: De Saussure. The Symbolic as a System of Meanings

The source for the concept of the Symbolic and of the idea of symbolic power can with some degree of qualification be taken to be the concepts of structural linguistics, structural anthropology and the philosophy of symbolic forms. This perceived influence is notably mentioned by Pierre Bourdieu in his lecture “Social Space and Symbolic Power” [15]. The reference is to the concepts put forward by Ferdinand de Saussure, Ernst Cassirer and Claude Lévi-Strauss, all of whose works had a direct effect on the formation of the concept of the Symbolic and symbolic power.

Despite the fact that all the concepts in question are only indirectly connected with matters of both power and fashion, they did play a fundamental role in the formation of the Gestalt of the Symbolic. One of the important elements in the programme of the Symbolic was Saussure’s theory of language. That theory, presented in the *Course in General Linguistics* [16], a compilation published in 1916 of notes of the lectures that he gave at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911, had a major impact on the development of all subsequent 20th-century philosophy. In his concept of speech, founded upon the combination of signifier and signified, he noted two important factors: the indeterminacy of the signified and the arbitrary character of the signifier-signified combination.

Among those profoundly influenced was Lacan with his system of the Symbolic. In a talk given in Paris in 1957 and later published under the title “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud” [8, p. 249–89]. Lacan identifies the arbitrary nature of the connection between signifier and signified as an issue that has its origins in ancient philosophy. Nevertheless, it was specifically Saussure’s concept that marked the indeterminate nature of the sign as a modern-day analytical problem and made it a central theme in the discussion of social mechanisms, thinking and speech [17]. He presented content and meaning that does not possess direct significance, as a key component of language. Following Saussure’s lead, Lacan defines “nothing” as the most important element of language.

Another aspect of sign theory related to the programme of the Symbolic is the definition of the privilege of the signifier and the signified. Saussure is often credited with the creation of a model in which the signifier dominates over the signified. Lacan uses the formula S/s to denote this construct [8, p. 251]. Nonetheless, Lacan, and later Jacques Derrida as well [18, p. 35–7], pointed out that in reality the absolute character of that construct

was something attributed to Saussure by later commentators. In the pages of his *Course in General Linguistics*, the Swiss linguist spoke repeatedly of the privilege of the signified. It was that privilege of the signified and the revision of the position of the signified that became the basis of all subsequent understanding of the Symbolic. The signifier's task does not come down to banal representation of the signified. The signified possesses an additional semantic tool that can be seen as the basis of the Symbolic. The fact that the signifier is not limited to standing for a trite final meaning opens up the prospect of symbolic interpretation. That in turn implies that any form of speech, text or language construction ceases to be a primitive set of ultimate messages and becomes a more complex semantic system semantic system that establishes not connotations but ideological areas.

Saussure's work was of fundamental importance both for the formation of the Lacanian method of interpreting the Symbolic and for defining the figure of the Symbolic as a whole. For Saussure the Symbolic is not so much an area as an arrangement of connections. In essence, that is the model that lies behind the majority of mid-20th-century theories of power — from Pierre Bourdieu's social fields model to the concept of the rhizome in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Lacan draws attention to the fact that there is no meaning that does not reference another meaning [8, p. 250]. For Saussure the system of meanings actually is the system of relations. In that sense, the formation of connections of any sort — social, speech, power — is the formation of meanings, semantic vectors and dominants. A discourse on power, established within the system of fashion or outside of it, is a system of changing, interconnected meanings.

Ernst Cassirer: The Symbolic as the Basis and Philosophy of Symbolic Forms

The establishment of the concept of the Symbolic was also connected with the study of mythological systems. This vector, which developed over the course of the whole 19th century (Max Müller [19], Edward Taylor [20], James George Fraser [21]), was maintained in the 1920s and '30s (Ernst Cassirer [22], Georges Bataille) and found continuation in the analytical programme of the 1960s (Mircea Eliade [23], Roland Barthes [24]). This list could be expanded considerably: the study of mythological programmes, just like the concept of the symbol, is a field with which many scholars are connected one way or another. The mythological system proved to be fundamentally important for the understanding of the Symbolic.

A key role in the study of symbolic systems was played by the works of Ernst Cassirer. As a member of the Marburg School [25], Cassirer was an heir to two traditions at once: the philosophical Neo-Kantian line in the study of the symbol [26], the roots of which go back to the classical tradition, and the great interest in mythology as a subject for academic research. Cassirer numbered among the authors who saw the capacity to understand a symbol as the basis of human consciousness [27]. The concept of the symbol invests human thinking with something of fundamental importance — a mediated relationship to an object. Cassirer also formulated this paradigm in his later works, in particular, in the *Essay on Man* [28].

Cassirer points out that the symbol has no objective basis or real existence, but it does have content, which he refers to as “meaning” [28, p. 150]. In Cassirer's scheme of things, symbols establish relationships and semantic connections between objects. In essence,

this is close to the model proposed by Saussure, who regarded the Symbolic as a system of interrelationships and connections. Cassirer is also akin to Saussure's concept in his perception of the Symbolic as a function of language [22]. He sees the chief advantage of language as being its symbolic basis and the impossibility of reducing it to literal meaning. In this Cassirer was drawing upon early theories of language, in particular the attempt made by Wilhelm von Humboldt. Language cannot be reduced to the *Ding an sich*, or the thing-in-itself. Nor can it be reduced to individual words and their concrete meanings. The symbolic basis is the tool that makes speech a living flexible system. In fact, it is specifically the Symbolic that becomes the pinnacle of the development of language as a semantic form.

Talking about the Symbolic as a part of a mythological system, Cassirer draws attention to the specifics of its analytical practice. If speech is the chief tool of the Symbolic, the myth is its chief source. Cassirer points out that that the Symbolic is an instrument separating people from the world around them, a means of establishing a certain distance. In that sense, the Symbolic is not so much an object as a means. In Cassirer's view, the Symbolic is not merely an ideological area, but also a mechanism for action. Myth and symbolic practice do not identify the part and the whole. Categorical generalization is not a characteristic of the programme of the Symbolic.

This model contains two elements that were of fundamental importance in shaping subsequent pictures of the Symbolic. First, the Symbolic ignores logical systems and reveals itself to be a highly interesting phenomenon — a system capable of circumventing logical principles or distancing itself from them. Secondly, as a structure not associated with a logical system, the Symbolic does not employ the subordinating principle of cause and effect and in general does not presuppose the very possibility of hierarchical systems. This characteristic and model of the Symbolic would be fundamentally important in Foucault's constructs, as well as the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, that proceeded from the privilege of individual, decentralized connections.

Lévy-Bruhl: The Symbolic as Real

Cassirer's works became a fundamentally important precedent, both in the study of mythological systems and in the construction of a theory of the Symbolic. He was effectively the person who drew attention to the Symbolic as an extensive autonomous field, devoting three large volumes of his works to the subject. Cassirer pointed out that as part of the mythological programme the Symbolic is an important social tool. As an anthropologist, he spotlighted the social function of the Symbolic. Cassirer's writings are the foundation for the anthropological view of the question of the symbol, its significance and position in a societal system. That theme found continuation in the works of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl [29; 30] and later Claude Lévi-Strauss [12; 13].

In the 1920s and 1930s, Lévy-Bruhl turned to questions directly related to the matter of the Symbolic. The main works in which he expounded his observations on the topic can be considered to be *Primitive Mentality* (1922) [29] and *Primitives and the Supernatural* (1931) [30]. Lévy-Bruhl does not speak directly of the Symbolic, avoiding or simply not mentioning the term. The main subject of his investigations is pre-logical thinking, in which the figure of the Symbolic occupies a central position [31, p. 9].

Pre-logical (or extra-logical) thought is resistant to knowledge obtained from experience — it is mystic in character. The extra-logical mind ignores the principle of struc-

ture. It perceives a phenomenon in its entirety in its symbolic manifestations. In essence, Lévy-Bruhl identifies the Symbolic as the foundation of the pre-logical model, considering it the basis of mythological or pre-logical thinking. As one of the parameters of such thinking, the Symbolic mimics its structure and basic principles: indifference to a systematic approach, the absence of categories, a disinterest in verified experience, the lack of ordered taxonomic systems and disregard for the idea of the main and the secondary [31, p. 10].

In Lévy-Bruhl's scheme, the Symbolic arises as a mystic spectre, as the true marker and sign of the presence of something that does not exist. In that sense, within the mythological system, the Symbolic is a criterion of authenticity. The Symbolic is something that has considerably greater significance than actual reality. The idea that symbols can be more powerful than actuality and be perceived as the true reality and value became an important vector in the definition of the Symbolic. In particular, it proved fundamental to the work of Lévi-Strauss.

Lévy-Bruhl's writings do not so much focus on the creation of a general theoretical pattern of the Extra-Logical or Symbolic, as discuss immediate examples. His works are above all a description of the facts, rather than the presentation of a unified picture of the Symbolic. Nonetheless, it was Lévy-Bruhl who uncovered the Symbolic as a living anthropological model. The Symbolic is the basis of both mythological thinking and social relations. In this sense, Lévy-Bruhl turned out to be the immediate precursor of both the anthropological vector in the understanding of the Symbolic and of sociological theories associated with its interpretation. His concept in part formed the basis of the system later proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Elementary Exchange Structures: Lévi-Strauss, Marcel Mauss, Jacques Derrida

Lévi-Strauss drew upon the mythological and sociological schools, making them the basis for the methodology employed in his own research. The idea that a symbol can be more real than actual reality shaped both further studies of the myth and the direction of exploration of the social space. Lévi-Strauss laid out his observations on the reality of the symbol in the early work entitled *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), which they year before had formed the basis of the doctoral thesis he successfully defended at the Sorbonne [12].

That work contains two notable key moments connected with the sphere of the Symbolic. First, Lévi-Strauss points to the reality of the Symbolic. In doing so, he in part continues the observations made by Lévy-Bruhl and in part engages in a fresh exploration of the topic and the meaning of the Symbolic. Secondly, he draws attention to the phenomenon of the Symbolic as an instrument of exchange. In this undertaking, too, the founding-father of structural anthropology was acting at one and the same time as both the continuer of the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss and as a direct heir to the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.

In the section devoted to Marcel Mauss, Lévi-Strauss points to the absolute trustworthiness of the Symbolic. Assessing the social mechanism of exchange, he notes that the symbolic component specifically is of fundamental significance in the process. A societal group exchanges symbols, constructing upon its use of a Symbolic scheme an absolutely

real system of economics, communications, labour or politics. As a result, Lévi-Strauss de facto uncovers a paradox: the boundary between the symbolic and the real is hard to determine. How can one identify the elements of a social system? Are the markers associated with the representation of social institutions, and in some instances the institutions themselves, a symbolic instrument or an instrument of symbolic exchange?

The main field of human confrontation is not a real one but the Symbolic. It is precisely the Symbolic element that becomes the true possession, the acquisition and the marker. This observation about the reality of the Symbolic will become fundamental in Lacan's scheme of things, in which the Symbolic is a key indicator of the transition from nature to culture.

Another vector is the pattern of reasoning that has built up around the system of exchange and the phenomenon of the Gift, the discussion of which was initiated by Mauss [32]. The idea of exchange, including exchange involving the Symbolic, goes back to Saussure's theory of language. His *Course of General Linguistics* [16] laid out the conditions for an understanding of the indeterminacy of the signified and for the identification of the relative nature of the signifier. The idea of an exchange of signs inherent in speech is the exchange of an indefinite meaning for an abstract signified. The sound (or spelling) of a word becomes an expression of the obscure Symbolic.

The concept of exchange that Mauss examined was one of the first works to draw attention to the unclear boundaries in symbolic exchange. He is speaking about primitive societies and demonstrates that in archaic cultures the Symbolic plays a key role in both social structures and in the process of exchange. His subject of observation was the Gift — an economic form that lacks a direct equivalent. Jean Baudrillard among others considered this concept extremely radical [5]. Actually, this became the chief theme and stumbling block of most theories relating to the question of exchange, both monetary and linguistic [14]. What is the equivalent in the process of exchange and can we identify its boundaries? How can we determine the content of the Symbolic involved in the process of exchange or giving? Are we correctly determining the significance of the Symbolic that is an object of exchange? The main discussion connected with the phenomenon of the Gift arose essentially around that issue. Is an exchange possible without an equivalent, and what are the parameters, boundaries and meaning of this equation?

The problem of identifying the Symbolic and its meaning is much broader than a simple monetary form or barter exchange. The discussion around the Gift only partially reveals the essence of this matter. A Gift is a form that has no direct reciprocal identity. A gift ignores the category of cost. It does not presume the existence of an exact formal equivalent. A distinctive feature of the gifting mechanism is the operation of a symbolic instrument with the entire arrangement subordinated to a symbolic rather than a monetary form. The symbolic aspect allows the Gift to exist as a phenomenon. In the enlarged version of one of his lectures *Given Time: The Time of the King* [33], Jacques Derrida pointed out that a reciprocal gift initiates a formal monetary process of equivalent and return. A true Gift is an offering that does not envisage a counter gesture. The labyrinth of these meaty paradoxes can grow quite extensive. Derrida, in particular, starts off from the construct of "giving time" — that is to say making a gift of something that (so Derrida asserts [33, p. 163]) cannot belong to anyone; giving "all one's time" [33, p. 161] that one does not have or laying claim to time, the form of whose presence is not entirely understandable [34]. A genuine gift is imagined to be just as incomprehensible as time [35, p. 68]. The

symbolic form that marks absence as presence is one of the instruments that allows the Gift to elude the primitive monetary construct.

One of the main components of many theories connected with the problem of the Gift comes down in essence to us being unable to understand the boundaries of the Symbolic and not always correctly identifying its meaning. Both in the process of monetary return and in the mechanism of the Gift, the issue is not the actual fact of a hypothetical exchange, but its content. What is the content of the Symbolic when it comes to the confirmation of value, as happens, for example, in the realm of fashion?

The main difficulty with meaning in the context of a symbolic exchange (here fashion becomes one of the most frequently cited examples) is the indeterminate nature of the filling, content and meaning. This appreciably increases the difficulty of working with symbolic systems, especially if that activity aims at seeking direct meaning. In the overwhelming majority of cases, we can ascertain the breath of sense, the essence of which comes down to its indeterminacy [36]. It is also difficult for us to determine the boundaries of meaning, speaking about language, we find it hard to grasp the limits of the Symbolic, whose content consists not only in inner substance, but also in external connections.

Symbolic Exchange, Referent and Meaning

The fundamental question concerning the identification of the Symbolic is the question of its meaning. Precisely this becomes key for an understanding of the Symbolic. When considering the matter of the Symbolic, we do not always understand its content — we do not understand what exactly it denotes — as something that does not coincide with the phenomenon of the sign that is built upon the principle of signifier and signified. The Symbolic is devoid of direct meaning, connotation, the signified. At the same time, it possesses inner content and determining the sense of the Symbolic is one of the challenging tasks that proved to be a stumbling block. This issue, in particular, remained unresolved in Roland Barthes's "Fashion System" [37], which concerned itself more about the literal meaning of an object, a characteristic of the work that became the object of consistent criticism. Following Barthes's work, and against its background, it became obvious that fashion is not a sign, that it is founded upon the use of a symbolic programme. The question of the meaning of the Symbolic became one of the central themes in the work of Jean Baudrillard.

The question of the meaning of the object in relation to the mechanism of fashion was already identified in his early works *The System of Objects* [38] and *The Consumer Society* [39] as one of the central issues. While in those early works Baudrillard tends to speak of the phenomenon of symbolic exchange and the meaning that arises from the inversion of signifier and signified (the similarity in titles between Barthes's *Système de la Mode*, published in 1967, and *Le Système des objets* from the following year is evidently no coincidence), in his classic period (*Symbolic Exchange and Death* from 1976) [5] he focusses on the question of symbolic influence and symbolic meaning.

In *Symbolic Exchange* Baudrillard draws attention to two key points and touches upon two key issues related to the phenomenon of the Symbolic. The first is the problem of the referent of the Symbolic. The second is the possibility of its literal meaning. Baudrillard's solution to the first takes a radical form. Determining the possible conceptual coordinates

of the Symbolic, he indicates that the reference point of its semantic content is becoming not the unconscious but the deadly.

Baudrillard designates Death as the chief referent of the Symbolic, The entire symbolic programme — both modern and archaic — is bound up with Death. If symbolic systems have an archaic foundation to them, then it is constructed not through the primitive character of consciousness or the social system — their common basis becomes an appeal to Death. In this conception of fashion as part of a symbolic system, costume loses its frivolous or primitive aura and acquires the significance of a far-reaching, non-positive, profound system connected not with the programme of life, but with the idea of Death. Through the Symbolic, fashion can be correlated with the doctrine of the vanished, the otherworldly, the deadly. That invests the significance of fashion with a fundamentally different implication — as a phenomenon that makes contact with the other-worldly and looks not to vital systems but mortal forms as a referent. In this paradigm, the addressee of fashion becomes not life, but death.

Addressing the deadly alters fundamentally the meaning and understanding of fashion itself. For a long time, in the mass consciousness and among professional critics, costume was perceived as an expression of the life-affirming, the vital. The main characteristics of fashion, including the negative assessments of it, were always connected with the picture of something frivolous, carefree, full of life. Ideas of fashion were always associated with a life of ease and the physiology of sensual pleasure and hedonistic consumption. Fashion has often been cited as an example of a primitive mentality, as a reflexive action of primitive culture. The opposite is the case, however. The Symbolic, upon which the semantic construct of fashion is built, is an elaborate semantic system that testifies not to the simplicity, but to the complexity of the conventional archaic mentality [31].

The complexity of the extra-logical consciousness lies in the absence of literal meaning, in the ability to operate with extended and non-articulated bodies of meaning. Its supposed “primitiveness” may consist exclusively in referring to the pre-linguistic stratum of meaning. Fashion, like the Symbolic, is an appeal to what is beyond the bounds of language. Drawing a parallel between the Symbolic and the deadly, Baudrillard places fundamentally different accents, with fashion not supporting the idea of the vital, but being opposed to it. In the symbolic exchange (at least in the paradigm that Baudrillard puts forward) the referent of fashion becomes not Life, but Death.

At the same time, the referent of the Symbolic (and this is of fundamental importance for fashion, which is also considered part of the symbolic system) is a form of power. Power is not so much the referent as the goal of the Symbolic, the reference point for the sake of which the symbol gets created and moulded [40, p. 6]. In this sense, the Symbolic is not so much a part of the system of the unconscious as the norm for the social space, a tool that provides and supplies social connections. The specific nature of fashion lies in the fact that the image and appearance of power is constantly altering its contours and reference points: fashion changes all the time — its significance as a power structure remains. The category of “power” corresponds to an ever-changing signifier.

In *Symbolic Exchange* Baudrillard devotes a separate chapter to fashion — “Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code” [5, p. 129–152]. In it, the author, focussing on the privileges of a rational system, reproduces the main stereotypes associated with the critical understanding of fashion: frivolous, superficial, shallow. At the same time, when addressing the significance of costume, he points to its fundamental quality — indetermi-

nacy. Baudrillard seeks to explain, or at least to identify this phenomenon, writing of the “flotation of signs”, defining the chief parameter of the content for fashion as being fluidity and instability. Today, the convincingness of the picture of “drifting signs” that Baudrillard painted is not so crucial. Far more important is the fact that he draws attention to the indeterminate character of meaning and of the signified.

Baudrillard’s chief observation was the indefinite nature of the meaning of fashion, the impossibility of reducing its elements to a specific denominator and some final value. That indeterminacy is a direct consequence of fashion’s recourse to the format of the Symbolic. The monetary system for the production of meaning is a mere imaginary illusion associated with the fashion paradigm. Its main meaning is the absence of the advantage of an exchange economy founded on the law of value and exchange equivalent. And that is the key basis associated with the question of the formation of meaning — both the meaning of fashion and meaning in general. One of the problems with symbolic meaning is that it is established and modified not only by internal content, but also by a system of mutual relationships and links. The semantic charge of the Symbolic is its role and establishment in the social medium [41]. This element of the semantic system of the Symbolic can be correlated with the question of symbolic power — a topic that was explored step-by-step in the discussions and analytical projects of the 1960s.

Fashion and the Concept of Disciplinary Power: Michel Foucault

The mechanism of power and its specific nature became a subject for discussion in a succession of studies during the 1960s and 1970s. Michel Foucault [3], Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari [4; 42], Pierre Bourdieu [6] are only some of the authors in whose work the mechanism of power became one of the central themes. The main idea of that period was a shift in conceptions about the phenomenon and structure of power. The main tendency in the overwhelming majority of the observations presented is a change in how power is pictured. From this time on, it was viewed not only, and not so much, as a legal institution or political tool, but as a system of interpersonal relationships, as the configuration of a social system.

Michel Foucault can be reckoned one of the main ideologists of the new concept of power [43]. Already in his early works, he put forward the concept of dispersed power that is not arranged in the form of a vertical system of succession, but rather exists as a system of private horizontal connections. Specifically, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, he presents power as a consistent system of which medicine, education, religion and other social institutions form a part. He maintained the thesis of the inversion of disciplinary power in later works as well — 1975’s *Discipline and Punish* [3] and 1976’s *The History of Sexuality* [44].

The concept of diffuse power is fundamental to an understanding of the mechanism of fashion. Power, regarded not as a system of administration, but as a mechanism for establishing values, is associated with the order of business for fashion. The agenda of the dominant style or views with its determination of influences and tastes *is* power. In this model, the doctrine of symbolic power, bound up with the analytical landscape of the 1960s, changes the conception of fashion as an abstract system connected exclusively with the dynamics of monetary programmes and marketing decisions. Fashion gets included in the discourse of power and is the basis for it. Establishing a fashion influence is, above all, establishing power relationships,

Michel Foucault indicated that in 17th-century Europe a radically new understanding of power began to take shape together with a fundamentally different understanding of power relationships. The essence of the change lay not only in the affirmation of the category of law and rights, but also in the proliferation and establishment of tools of influence. Foucault defined this new type of social relationships as “disciplinary power” [45, p. 60], that is to say, a system that focusses on the consolidation of influences rather than direct pressure.

In works of different dates, Foucault writes of the conditional nature of legal power and of power as a form of social relations. Foucault equates “legal” power with the legislative system and the agenda of government. In this sense, the traditional idea of the system of power is associated with the idea of the state and the forms by which it functions [45, p. 60]. Foucault points out that the mechanism of power relations is in fact larger and more subtle — it is not limited to the operations of the apparatus of state but can be considered to be the consistent system of relations that is established between people in any dialogue and any interaction.

In this understanding of the system of power, might ceases to be perceived as an element of the administrative system and is seen as the balance and result of the system of social relations, as an ability to set the norm. Foucault calls this act of establishing “the diversity of power relations” — an infinite number of connections that are built in a dialogue, action or statement. The system of power that is formed within the framework of this model does not come down to a single point — it is all-penetrating in character [44, p. 122]. It is not concentrated within the confines of a formal legal vertical hierarchy, it is everywhere. Power relations are formed in all parts of the social system.

The Concept of Dispersed Power and Setting Norms

The role of instrument of such mediated or dispersed power is played not by the law, but by the norm [46]. The establishment of normative, regulatory systems is the mechanism through which power is exerted. The norm can be considered one of the forms of social agreement and a means of achieving equilibrium, while at the same time the norm is a tool of repression. In this sense, power lies in the establishment of generally accepted standards, whether those are prescriptive or have arisen naturally. The method of such a system of power is not punishment, but control — the establishment of social systems and collective values that endorse this or that ideological agenda.

At the same time, the norm becomes a standard that comes from outside. It is formed within the system but is the result of incoming connections. The norm is, first and foremost, what is established through external influence. Viewed in this way, fashion is always repressive. There are by definition always more vectors coming in from outside and having a dominating function than outgoing elements. At the same time, the concept of the norm presupposes some external referent — something that Wittgenstein pointed out. In his *Philosophical Investigations* [47], he speaks about the formation of the phenomenon of “private language” that develops within the framework of an initially established norm. Any individual movement occurs within those set bounds, conforming to a certain standard.

The model of dispersed power outlined by Foucault redefines the range of issues associated with the norm-setting mechanism. In Foucault’s model it is obvious that the

standard is not some given natural characteristic, but rather a set of social preferences and distinctions. Saul Kripke also turned his attention to this phenomenon when discussing Wittgenstein's works and his concept of "private language" [48]. Society always controls the application and establishment of a rule. The social system is a guarantee of the correctness or the chosen standard, irrespective of how close that conviction is to the true state of affairs. Kripke understands this phenomenon extremely broadly, extending it to any imposition of language or action. All that we know about the world around us we know from our acquaintances, teachers, parents. In other words, our ideas of the standard are predetermined by the social system. Kripke considers established connections and the social contract to be the sole guarantee and confirmation of the rule. There are no grounds for identifying an established rule as the norm, but it is determined by the tacit agreement of the established rules.

The norm is not determined by need. It is an ideological rather than a physical concept. The establishment of a norm is the establishment of an ideology, a way of life. A standard can be conceived as an impersonal, but totally widespread rule [31]. In this sense, the concept of fashion is egalitarian. In some instances, people picture the norm as a means of exerting pressure initiated by one or other social group. However, the standard has no personal or private relationships. In the model of power suggested by Michel Foucault, the norm is the result of countless determinations and influences within which it is impossible (or virtually impossible) to determine a personal vector. The belief that the norm (and the realm of fashion can be viewed as a special instance of the arbitrary imposition of norms) is established by individual personal influence is an illusion. If the normative system has a personalized element, then it is affirmed as the result of impersonal mediated connections.

It would be tempting to examine fashion as a mechanism for setting a new standard, but in reality this is not entirely the case. The intention of fashion is far from always becoming the norm. Fashion is not always a deviation or anomaly, which over time comes to be perceived as a standard. Yet it does always function as an element in the regulations imposed by power. Closely akin to the phenomenon of the norm, it establishes not only and not so much a system of standards but a phenomenon of power.

Establishing a fashionable influence or standard is one of the elements of the picture that has been painted. Fashion and its impact is a system of power statements and regulations. The assertion of style or taste is the establishment of power. The establishment of power is the establishment of ideological influence, and fashion is one of the components of that mechanism. This type of power has no purpose — it cannot be reduced to the achievement of certain declared goals. Its agenda is the continual establishment of situational relationships, the building of a constantly emerging process that exists in the conditions of the social field. Essentially, this specific model finds its parallels in Deleuze and Guattari's construct of the rhizome and in the programme of Baudrillard's social field.

The Rhizome and the Social Network

One of the concepts that proved to be bound up with Foucault's construct of diffuse power is the rhizome model. The idea of it was formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their major joint work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, published in two volumes in 1972 and 1980 [4; 42]. The concept of the rhizome was originally advanced in opposition to the view that there was no alternative to the preference for linear systems

that is typical of the classic European thought format. Deleuze and Guattari considered the hierarchical system with the primary and subordinate secondary the chief attribute of the European mindset and outlined a model that could serve as an alternative to that *modus cogitandi*. They chose as an example to describe the system of natural connections the botanical model of the rhizome or root system that does not have a highly pronounced centralized structure and develops as an arrangement of mediated connections [49].

The rhizome model takes the form of a system of horizontal connections without any hierarchical ideological center. That makes the model advanced by Deleuze and Guattari akin to Foucault's ideas. The rhizome lacks a centralized structure; it has no agreed center. In this respect, the rhizome contradicts the models that have traditionally been regarded as formative for European culture: from the principle of centralized authority to the taxonomic model of thinking. A whole set of characteristics are as a rule listed for the rhizome. They include the following. First, the rhizome lacks any principle of succession and sequence in its elements. Second, the principle of subject-object relations is absent. Third, the rhizome does not imply a genesis and progressive development. Fourth, the discontinuation of an existing connection does not imply the disappearance of the rhizome, but merely a change in its configuration [50]. The rhizomatic process has no causes, properties or ordered structure. Thus, the rhizome opposes logical principle and denotes an alternative model to Western thinking [31].

Deleuze and Guattari present the rhizome not only, and not so much as a system of connections, but rather as a field of conflicts. The sense of the rhizome lies not in the confirmation of connections, but in the establishment of fields of tension. While rejecting the traditional principle of hierarchical subordination, Deleuze at the same time points to the hierarchy as the consequence of actual inequality. In his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* [51], he notes that a hierarchy of subordination/domination arises within any system where unequal forces exist. Any binary connection is *de facto* uneven, while the combination of two poles of power is aimed at establishing influence, or else subordination.

In the rhizome construct, two main points seem to be important. The first is the concept of the structure as an infinite number of individual connections. The second is the fragmentation of the field into infinitely small elements that act as agents of the system. In the case of fashion, this implies the building of an infinite number of relationships and the formation of an infinite number of segments (e. g., subcultures) that make up the system of fashion. This in turn leads to fundamental change in the picture of fashion and a fundamentally different understanding of it. For a long time, fashion was viewed as a centralized system associated with a hierarchical principle. Georg Simmel, for example, identified the principle of fashion within the framework of a theory in which fashionable practices and habits were passed down from the upper classes to the lower.

The concept of fashion as some single pillar with principles that develop from the top down was always somewhat dubious. The rhizome concept presented its structure as a system with fundamentally different possibilities. The rhizome does not presume the existence of a single centre, including in fashion. At the same time, the system of fashion is split into an infinite number of segments, reduced not just down to a particular person, but in some cases to individual items of clothing. In the rhizome structure, the Us-Them antithesis, which is of fundamental importance for the establishment of the fashion mechanism, can come down not just to extremely small groups of people, but even to single

individuals. Any entity, from one person up, can be an actor in the field and participate in the establishment of power relations. That model was delineated in Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of the "social field" and "symbolic power".

Pierre Bourdieu: The Social Field and Symbolic Power

Bourdieu's concepts of the "social field" and "symbolic power" continued a direction of inquiry set by the analytical system of the 20th century but employed a different methodology. In effect, Bourdieu behaved simultaneously as the follower of the research and methodological approaches of Saussure, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. On the other hand, he showed himself to be a successor to the sociological theories of Durkheim and Lewin. Investing the theoretical constructs of continental philosophy with practical meaning.

Bourdieu defines the social field both as a part of the social space and as a system of relations [15]. The social field is a set of interactions and connections involving the actors in the system. That system may be local and may differ from neighbouring communities. A field is a space containing positions connected through ideological or semantic tension. The positions within the social field are expressed in various hierarchical relationships.

Bourdieu's model is in fact close to both the rhizome structure and Foucault's notion of dispersed power. Just like Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault, Bourdieu focusses not on the substances but on the relationships between them, their connections. The social field, in turn, is defined by a set of "power tensions" that can be viewed as a network of symbolic relations. This observation became formative in a lecture that Bourdieu gave at the University of San Diego in 1986, subsequently published under the title *Social Space and Symbolic Power* [15]. Nevertheless, the idea of the unity of social space, social field and symbolic relations can be considered the central line of his reasoning, continuing from one work to another.

Bourdieu considers the central instrument in the establishment of the symbolic foundation to be the *habitus* — a mental model for comprehending the social world that appears as the result of mastering the systems of social reality. The habitus is a set of acquired and assimilated patterns, principles of acting, that can be viewed as the basis of a conditional social division. The commonality and character of symbolic preferences are determined specifically by the habitus. The image of symbolic systems is as it is set and formed within the framework of the assimilated social programme. Effectively Bourdieu determines the Symbolic, assimilated and expressed through the habitus, to be a condition for the existence of a social space. That space in turn becomes the arena of a symbolic struggle for the right to shape the conception of a legitimate order.

One of the principle forms of the Symbolic is systems that are aimed not so much towards the transformation of means of expression as towards altering modes of perception. It is precisely the editing of modes of perception that becomes the aim of the determinations associated with the programme of the Symbolic. Bourdieu points to the existence of a specific symbolic logic, which ensures independence from the structures into which it is inscribed. Symbolic relationships are a continuation of real-life relationships and systems. In particular, Bourdieu sees symbolic power relations as a continuation of actual power relations. The meaning of the Symbolic lies not in the creation of something imaginary, but in the legitimization of the existing order. Bourdieu defines symbolic power as the capacity to create reality through language and speech, and that succeeds only when con-

cepts correspond to realities and can be correlated with them. One of the functions of the Symbolic, according to Bourdieu, is to discover real-life objects.

In this construct, the image of fashion, which is often presented as an affirmation of the non-existent, seems debatable. No matter how frivolous the elements of the fashion system may seem, their meaning lies in the reflection of the real order of things, even in cases where the meaning of symbolic institutions is not clear to the percipient subject. Fashion is not groundless manipulation, but it turns out to be the establishment of an unclear meaning. Fashion in this sense is an advocacy for the social recognition of symbolic capital and symbolic meaning. Paraphrasing Bourdieu's words about symbolic power, we can say that fashion is the striving to arrive at an absolute vision of the world, one which has persuasive power [15, p. 160].

Symbolic Power and the Problem of Its Identification

One of Bourdieu's main ideas can be considered to be his thesis about the reliability of the Symbolic. The point of it is not only that a subject interprets the Symbolic as real, but that the symbolic system does have objective precedents in reality. The symbolic, which is founded upon pre-linguistic stage of thinking and cannot always be precisely articulated, is nonetheless absolutely real — it can be correlated with the circumstances of reality. The Symbolic remains an important basis for social actions and can be determined to be the cause of certain decisions.

Pierre Bourdieu voiced these observations as early as 1973, during a lecture at the University of Chicago. The materials of that lecture were published in 1977, in a paper entitled *On Symbolic Power* [6]. In that work, he also speaks as a protagonist of Foucault's idea of diffuse power, calling symbolic power “invisible”. At the same time, he insists upon its absolute reliability. Furthermore, following the representatives of mythological schools, Bourdieu presents the Symbolic as a tool not so much for the cognition of the world as for its construction. That is to say, not only is the observation that “the authentic becomes the symbolic” true, but so is its converse — “the symbolic becomes the authentic”. In this sense, one of the features of the fashion tool might be said to be the use of the Symbolic to indicate reliable distinctions or the acknowledgement of symbolic markers as reflecting the state of reality.

Symbolic power is the ability to construct reality by establishing the existing order. In this process, symbols not only become a tool of social integration, they are a tool for establishing and regulating the social world. Bourdieu presents the imposition of symbolic values as a form of symbolic violence. The process of establishing is not a matter of communication, but rather one of influence and power. The purpose of these efforts is to establish a priority picture of the world. The world in which a subject will live depends on what sort of symbolic regimen he or she manages to establish or accept. Ultimately, symbolic power belongs to those who successfully engage in the production of symbolic values.

Bourdieu describes symbolic power and the ability to institute symbolic values as a tool of “class struggle”. In doing so, he was following the rules of academic debate in his day. In point of fact, the question of establishing symbolic power goes wider. It is not restricted to the dubious boundaries of the “class”, but rather extends to broad social strata or else, on the contrary, is confined to local social groups. Symbolic power is an infinite number of impositions that differ not only in character, but also in level.

Fashion is one of the indisputable forms of symbolic power. It focusses on setting values. And one of the most interesting aspects of the fashion system is the authenticity of symbolic directives, its connection with social and ideological realia. It is hard to impose or establish a fashion artificially: if a particular value has become established, then it did so by natural means. Fashion and marketing should not be confused here. Fashion as an instrument that establishes values and marketing as a mechanism for making money, which is far from always connected with the establishment of particular social norms. The main difficulty with fashion, as with symbolic power, is the problem of identification. We are far from always correctly determining the symbolic meaning of both fashion and relative power. And far from always in possession of the tool needed to define or identify the Symbolic. Its meaning often remains unclear, and its significance eludes calculation in monetary terms. The symbolic, while it remains the main social instrument and the main instrument of fashion, in the overwhelming majority of cases, still goes unrecognized.

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