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History, Psychology, and Fashion:

The Bizarre, Weird, Wacky—and Cool

Abstract

In this paper, we will review what historians and psychologists have discovered about the nature of fashion—be it traditional or bizarre. Throughout history, people have conformed to traditional notions of "proper dress," and we will discuss their motivation for doing so. We will, however, focus on the variety of motives people have had for challenging traditional standards and choosing to dress in ways that most people consider bizarre, weird, wacky—or cool.

I. Introduction

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.

—Oscar Wilde—

In this paper, we will review what historians and psychologists have discovered about the nature of fashion—be it traditional or bizarre. Throughout history, people have conformed to traditional notions of "proper dress," and we will discuss their motivation for doing so. We will, however, focus on the variety of motives people have had for challenging traditional standards and choosing to dress in ways that most people consider bizarre, weird, wacky—or cool.

II. Definitions

The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos, 2007) defines fashion as:

> . . . the styles of artistic and cultural expression, garments, manners, and customs prevalent in a particular time and place. Fashion may be transient or irrational but often reflects the zeitgeist or mood of society (p. 368).

Theorists often use such terms as "dress," "clothing," "costume," "style," and "decoration" as synonyms. The bizarre is defined as: "odd, strange, or unexpected" (p. 123). In this paper, we will discuss the motives that may underlie men and women's attraction to the bizarre in fashion.

Illustration 1. Paris Fashion Week, August 28, 2006
http://www.eglobe1.com/index.php/2006/08/28/weird-fashion

III. Historical Perspectives on Fashion

Traditionally, when historians wrote about the "history of fashion," what they really meant was a history of the costumes worn by kings and queens, aristocrats, the

Catholic clergy, or court entertainers and theatre folk. Before the Industrial Revolution, for 95%-99% of people (i.e., the peasants), a concern with fashion was a luxury they could neither afford nor think about. Survival was all. In Robb's (2009) recent history of France, he points out that French historical writing about the 18th and 19th century is really the story of about 300 people. The great masses only recently entered the history books, standing traditional history on its head.

Robb, for example, paints a startling picture of how isolated and how poverty-stricken French peasants were well into the 19th century. Before the French Revolution, the appellation "France" was reserved for the small mushroom-shaped province centered on Paris. Beyond that quasi-urban oasis, France was a rural wilderness; much of France had never been mapped. (And with reason: in the early 1740s, a member of Jacques Cassini's cartographic expedition was hacked to death by the natives of the Mézenc mountain range. They assumed that strangers [and that meant anyone living just a few miles away] must be evil and dangerous.)

A survey carried out in the 1790s revealed that French, the language of civilized Europe, was spoken by no more than three million people (a mere 11% of the French population). A century later, only about 20% of the population felt comfortable speaking French. After the Revolution, almost 33% of the population lived in isolated farms and cottages or in hamlets with fewer than 35 inhabitants and often no more than eight. Robb continues: "A peasant girl who went to work in Paris might, when looking through the scullery window at the street, see more people at a glance than she had known in her entire previous life" (p. 13.)

One of the most oft' cited descriptions of the French peasants of this era comes from Jean de La Bruyère's (1688) depiction:

> The wild animals that one sees in the countryside—sun-blackened beasts, both male and female, attached to the earth that they stubbornly dig. They make sounds that resemble articulate speech, and when they rise up on their feet, they show a human face . . . At night they creep away into lairs where they live on black bread, water and roots (Robb, 2009, p. 17).

The situation in England was much the same. Lawrence Stone (1977) pointed out that well in into the Early Modern period (i.e., into the 16th and 17th centuries), young English men and women teetered at the brink of survival. They had no time to worry about such luxuries as fashion. People's hair was filled with lice. They had bad breath and rotting teeth. They rarely washed. Their skin crawled with eczema, scabs, running sores, oozing ulcers, and other disfiguring skin diseases. Women suffered from serious gynecological problems—vaginal infections, ulcers, tumors, and bleeding, which made sexual intercourse uncomfortable, painful, or impossible. Men and women who engaged in sexual relations were likely to catch any number of venereal diseases. (James Boswell, the 18th century biographer, contracted gonorrhea at least 17 times.)

Stone continues:

Women wore stays made of bone or leather, which lasted for decades and were worn day in and day out without ever being washed. They also wore quilted petticoats that were also never washed and were worn until they disintegrated (p. 306-307).

Robert Darnton (1984) described French peasant life in the 16th and 17th centuries this way:

> Men labored from dawn to dusk, scratching the soil on scattered strips of land with plows like those of the Romans and hacking at their grain with primitive sickles, in order to leave enough stubble for communal grazing. Women married late—at age twenty-five to twenty-seven—and gave birth to only five or six children, of whom only two or three survived to adulthood. Great masses of people lived in a state of chronic malnutrition, subsisting mainly on porridge made of bread and water with some occasional, home-grown vegetables thrown in. They ate meat only a few times a year, on feast days or after autumn slaughtering if they did not

> have enough silage to feed the livestock over the winter. They often failed to get the two pounds of bread (2,000 calories) a day that they needed to keep up their health, and so they had little protection against the combined effects of grain shortage and disease (p. 24).
>
> The peasants of early modern France inhabited a world of stepmothers and orphans, of inexorable, unending toil, and of brutal emotions, both raw and repressed. The human condition has changed so much since then that we can hardly imagine the way it appeared to people whose lives really were nasty, brutish, and short (p. 29).

Once, when historians recounted the history of a nation, they meant the history of kings and queens, religious transformations, and wars. In recent years, however, a paradigm shift has occurred in history. Theorists like Banner (1983), Coontz (1988), Degler (1980), Gay (1986), and Stone (1977) have changed the way scholars think about "history." Historians are now studying history from the "bottom up" rather than the "top down." Today, the majority of historians are studying the lives not of kings and queens but the lives of the majority of humanity, utilizing demographic data (marriage records, birth and death records, records of divorce), architecture, medical manuals, church edicts, legal records, songs, and the occasional written treasure that made it through the ranks of a population that was mostly illiterate.

In our individualistic, urban, affluent world, fashion finally has been democratized; no longer is it simply the province of the top people. As early as the 1960s, Paris and *haute couture* fashion palaces such as Cardin, Courrèges, Dior, Saint Laurent, and Ungaro, began to give way to Gap, Benneton, Banana Republic, boutiques, ready-to-wear, and thrift shop chic (Lobenthal, 1990). Fashion has become of concern not just to the readers of *Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Elle, and Marie Clare*, but to the youngest Web scanners and bloggers, Facebook communicators, and teen-age tweeters.

See Barnard (2002), Davis (1992), Partington (1992) for a discussion of this shift from fashion elitism to fashion democratization.

Whether it's high fashion or low, all agree as to the current scholarly fascination with fashion. As Craik (1994) observed:

> Fashion has been especially attractive to postmoderists . . . because its slipperiness—the ambivalence, polyvalence, semiotic smorgasbord and excess—fits into a world view of consumerism, pluralism and masquerade gone mad—the unfettered circulation of free-floating signs. . . Fashion is . . . an early warning system of major cultural transformations and a parody of hypermodern culture . . . Fashion is a visual commentary on the excess of post-modern culture providing aesthetic holograms that introduce the *appearance* of radical novelty, while maintaining the *reality* of no substantial change (pp. 7-8.).

IV. The Dialectic of Fashion: Conformity versus a Fascination With the Bizarre

Sociologists have long been interested in the nature of fashion (Blumer, 1969; Lang & Lang, 1961; Sapir, 1931; Simmel, 1904).

Sociologist Georg Simmel (1904) gives us a sense of what theorists in *fin de siècle* sociology thought about the impact of social-class on fashion:

> Fashion is a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those of a social class and segregates them from others. The elite initiates a fashion and, when the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandons it for a newer mode—a process that quickens with the increase of wealth. Fashion does not exist in tribal and classless societies. It concerns eternals and superficialities where irrationality does no harm. It signalizes the lack of personal freedom; hence it characterizes the female and he middle class, whose increased social freedom is matched by intense individual subjugation. Some forms are intrinsically more suited to the modifications of fashion than others: the internal unity of the forms called "classic" makes them immune to change (p. 130).

The dichotomy between the yearning to conform to fashion's dictates versus the desire to rebel, has been described via a number of contrasts: the dialectic between

society and the individual; mask and advertisement; conformity and innovation; fashion, non-fashion, and anti-fashion; need for union versus isolation (Barthes, 2006; Barnard, 2002; Davis, 1992; Simmel, 1971).

A. A Definition of Motives

The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos, 2007) defines a motive as:

> The impetus that gives purpose or direction to human or animal behavior and operates at a conscious or unconscious level . . . Motives are frequently divided into: (a) physiological, primary, or organic motives, such as hunger, thirst, and need for sleep; and (b) personal, social, or secondary motives, such as affiliation, competition, and individual interests and goals. An important distinction must also be drawn between internal motivating forces and external factors, such as rewards or punishments, which can encourage or discourage certain behaviors. (p. 594).

In this paper, we will be continue to be concerned with the cultural, historical, social, and biological motives that may spark people's fashion choices.

V. Major Motives for Fashion

Throughout history, people (who did not live in poverty) attempted to signal their social, religious, class, and occupational status by the clothes they wear. As Roland Barthes (2006) observed:

> Dress is, in the fullest sense, a "social model", a more or less standardized picture of expected collective behaviour; and it is essentially at this level that it has meaning (p. 14).

Until recently, most theorists had generally agreed with Flügel's (1930) that fashion had three major purposes (the Big Three): modesty, a desire for protection, and ornamentation. But fashion is more than that. Take a foray into the worlds of culture, art, and literature, and suddenly you become aware of how narrow Western scholars' perspective has been. There are a multitude of reasons why modern men and women

might be concerned with fashion (traditional *or* bizarre) and why they choose (or are forced) to dress as they do (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Hatfield & Rapson, 2008)..

Recently, we asked University of Hawaii students to list the reasons why they and their friends care about fashion and why they make the fashion choices they do. Our respondents were typical of Hawaii's multi-ethnic population. They belonged to an array of religious groups (Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Jewish, Mormon, Other, and None) and possessed diverse ethnic ancestries (African, Chinese, European, Filipino, Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean, Samoan, Vietnamese, Other-American, and, especially, mixed.)

Students provided a surprising array of reasons for their preferences. Among the motives informants mentioned were the Big Three that scholars have so much studied, but they mentioned an impressive array of other reasons as well, among them: a desire for self-esteem and status; a desire to conform to society's standards; and a desire to appear masculine or feminine. And there were more: wishes to please parents, lovers, and friends; to make oneself beautiful/handsome, sexy; to display modesty; to conceal unattractive features; to save the World (boycotting sweatshop-manufactured garb); to protest political or social injustice; to protect oneself from the Evil Eye or Islamic authorities; a desire for conquest /power; the seeking of vengeance (a desire to conquer, degrade, and punish); a desire for security (a security blanket); a yearning to make a mate/date/friend jealous; curiosity; for comfort and relaxation.

Let us now consider some of these motives in more detail. First, let us focus on the motives people have for conforming to society's dictates.

V. Motives for Conforming to the Reigning Fashion Standards

Traditionally, people signaled their gender, social class, and occupation by the fashion choices they made.

A. Gender

Many cultural theorists have pointed out that "proper" dress is a crucial marker for gender (Craik, 1993). In Shakespearean comedies, the playwright delights in playing with both social class and gender, luxuriating in the mix-ups produced by a simple change in costume.

There is some truth in the contention that "clothes make the man" or woman. Once at the Kinsey Institute, while attending a lecture by a six-person transgender panel, Elaine challenged a couple of her scholarly chums to a bet. The panelists consisted of two distinct groups: Tall, somewhat husky women (who had once been men); and tiny little men (who had once been women). "Which group will get the most respect?" Elaine asked. "Men or women? Nature or nurture?" Usually, as scientists have documented, audiences traditionally treat men with more deference. There are many reasons why this is so. Men possess the habit of command. They speak more and talk louder. They interrupt. They spread out in space. And audiences treat men with more respect—they pay rapt attention to men's every word and tend to ignore women. In large groups, when men ask a question, people in the audience smile their encouragement. When woman ask the same kind of question, audience members look annoyed and roll their eyes. "What will this audience do?" Elaine asked. Some bet that since the Kinsey audience was feminist and liberal in the extreme, they would treat M to W and W to M with equal deference. Elaine disagreed. She was willing to place her bets on nurture—the tall, husky women would get the respect. All of the Kinsey scholars, including Elaine, turned out to be

wrong. *In this panel, clothes made the man or woman.* The audience hung on every word of the tiny, little men (dressed in men's garb), and ignored, interrupted, or dismissed the big, busty women (dressed in women's garb).

B. Social Class

In hierarchical societies, people's social class is often writ in their dress (Barnard, 2002). As Cranik (1994) observed:

> The sumptuary laws which lasted from the 13th to the 17th centuries are the most commonly cited examples of the attempt to regulate fashion and codify display. These laws specified appropriate clothing according to occupation and social status. In particular, they imposed restrictions on eligibility to wear certain kinds of garments, fabrics, and accessories—especially fur, gold, silk, and jewels. Since the rules were set by the court, they sought to enhance the status of the aristocracy through sartorial distinctiveness. (p. 180).

A 4th century BCE historian reported: "Purple for dyes fetched its weight in silver at Colophon" in Asia Minor. Thus, in Byzantium, its production was controlled by the Imperial Court, which restricted its use for the coloring of silks. Members of the imperial family were "born in the purple" (Jacoby, 1997).

In the 16th century Louis XIV and Charles II both attempted to impose dress codes in order to maintain the exclusiveness of the court and prevent the *nouveaux riches* from displaying their wealth. (Foley, 1973). It was illegal for anyone not in the aristocracy to wear certain ornaments, colors, or clothes.

> These rules applied to both men and women:
> Costume collections show that men's clothing—at least for the wealthy—was elaborate and extravagant. For example, 17th-century men's dress was based on doublet, breeches, and cloak. When resources permitted, these garments were heavily embroidered, sometimes trimmed with silver or gold threat, edged with satin and featured lace collars (Hart, 1984, pp. 50-55.)

McDowell (1984) added:

> Clothes were a tool of oppression, a weapon wielded against the poor. They were used to drive home the lesson that the grand were not simply different, they were better, *because* they were rich. They wore on their backs the proof that they were superior intellectually, morally, and socially, (p. 10.)

Not everyone was content with these class based rules.

An anthropologist, Edward Sapir (1931) observed:

> As fashion has always tended to be a symbol of membership in a particular social class and as human beings have always felt to urge to edge a little closer to a class considered superior to their own, there must always have been the tendency for fashion to be adopted by circles which had a lower status than the group setting the fashions (p. 142.)

This is still true today. For generations, Dick Rapson's family was invested in the New York lower East-side rag trade. His mother, Grace, scoured French fashion magazines and sketched cheap "knock-offs." His father, Lou Rapson (once Rapaport), the owner of Rapson Frocks, transformed these sketches into cheap, popular fashions. As a boy, after school, Dick carted these newly minted clothes from his father's sweatshop factory in the Garment District to fancy department stores like Bloomingdale's, Macy's, and the like. The aim, of course, was to allow middle-class women to pretend to a social cachet (by wearing "designer" dresses) at a price they could afford.

C. Occupation

Carlyle (1833/1987) observed:

> Society, which the more I think of it astonishes me the more, is founded upon Cloth . . . First that *Man* is a *spirit,* and bound by invisible bonds to *All Men;* Secondly, that he *wears Clothes,* which are the visible emblems of that fact. Has not your Red, hanging individual, a horsehair wig, squirrel skins and a plush gown; whereby all mortals know that he is a JUDGE? (p 48.)

At times, one need only look at a person to guess their occupation. U. S. General David Petraeus is beribboned and all spit and polish; the Pope Benedict XVI is resplendent in his purple and gold *zuchetto* (skullcap), *mozzetta* (a hooded cape), *sottana* or s*outane* (a full buttoned cassock), a red sash, and his *pantofole* (red slippers). The

British Barrister sports a 17th century horsehair wig, stiff collar, and black gown. All these costumes are designed to invoke tradition, authority, order, and to intimidate.

They are not the only ones. You can generally recognize chefs, bakers, butlers, maids, gardeners, cleaners, nannies, sailors, and the like by their traditional garb. People dress appropriately for going to college, for doing housework, gardening, going grocery shopping, or going to the beach. Criminal gangs like the Aryan Brotherhood, Nazi Lowriders, Nuestra Familia, and DC Blacks, wear tattoos, gang colors, and special clothing to identify their allegiances. Strippers and prostitutes can generally be identified by their dress or state of undress.

IV. Bizarre Dressing

Illustration 2. Hong Kong Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2010
http://www.weirdasianews.com/2009/08/28/strange-fashion-trends-asia/

In *Weird Like Us,* Powers (2000) points out that people have always been attracted by the weird and strange. Unconventional displayers of fashion have been tagged by a variety of names: bohemians, dandies, beats, hippies, slackers, gender fuckers, Riot Girrrls, hip-hop nation, ecotopia, and recombinant techno-revolutionaries. Theorists

point out that men and women may possess a variety of motives for dressing bizarrely: to assert their individuality, to attract attention, to express themselves, to rebel against society, and to play, among others. Let us consider a few of these motives in some more detail.

A. Assertion of Individuality

The world's cultures differ profoundly in the extent to which they emphasize collectivism or individualism (although some cultural researchers focus on related concepts: interdependence versus independence, traditionalism versus modernism, ruralism versus urbanism, poverty versus affluence, or family orientation versus a global perspective).

Individualistic cultures (such as the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, and the countries of Northern and Western Europe) tend to focus on personal goals. Collectivist cultures such as China, many African and Latin American nations, Greece, southern Italy, and the Pacific Islands, on the other hand, press their members to subordinate personal interests to those of the group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Triandis and his colleagues point out that in individualistic cultures, young people are allowed to "do their own thing"; in collectivist cultures, the group comes first. Simmel (1904) argued that two social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion: a desire to affirm one's own, personal individuality *and* to affirm one's membership in various groups. Without both impulses, he claims, fashion would not exist. (See also Braudel, 1981; Flügel, 1930; Polhemus & Procter, 1978; Wilson, 1992.)

Cultural researchers have proposed that an individualistic focus on personalized body ornamentation and fashion should be more common in modern,

industrialized countries than in traditional cultures with strong, extended family ties. Using the language common in his time, Simmel (1904) argued that societies in which the "socializing impulse" is more pronounced than the "differentiating impulse" (i.e., in the "primitive races") would have little if any interest in fashion. As he notes: Civilisation is required for fashion.

In periods of social change, a society may demonstrate an explosion of creativity as it become more individualistic, modern, and affluent. Last year in London, Dick and Elaine were having lunch in the Tate Modern. A class of English public school students—polite, regimented, and garbed in school uniforms that would have been appropriate in 18th century London—walked into the lunchroom. At an adjoining table, sat a class of visiting Japanese art students, chattering. Now in theory, England is a more individualistic society than Japan and the students' dress should have reflected that reality. But the times they are a' changing. In this artistic community, the budding Japanese artists had spiky hair, dyed in a riot of colors, and wore wildly individual costumes. Everything about them shouted: "I gotta be me!" Dick looked at me and said: "Individualism and collectiveness in action," and we both chuckled. So, indeed, time does not stand still. But surely, in spite of globalization, some cultural and fashion differences must remain.

Others who have observed that, in the interests of individuality, people may transgress traditional fashion standards, include Barnard (2002).

B. Attention Seeking

Throughout the ages, people have sought to attract attention to a cause or to themselves by their attention-capturing dress.

Davis (1992) observed:

> The milkmaid-attired court ladies in Marie Antoinette's *bergerie,* the absurdly bedecked Incroyables and Mervielleuses of postrevolutionary France, the London dandies of Brummel's time and latterly their nineteenth-century French imitators, the demimode of Lautrec's Paris and Malcolm Cowley's Greenwich Village, all reveled in and sought notoriety through their antifashion gestures (p. 162).

In the late 1990s, Courtney Love, the lead singer with the band "Hole", began to dress as a *kinderwhore.* Her costume was designed to send a mixed message. Smith (1999) characterized the look as "a mixture of jailbait and whore" (p. 35). Love tousled her hair and wore "sluttish" makeup ("witch" and "slut" were penned on her arms) but her clothes were innocently childish. She wore a pure white, lacy dress; a pink sash, and carried a baby doll. In part Love and her associates were mocking traditional feminine decorum, but Love (a clever publicist) also had a purely commercial interest. She wanted to attract attention to her band, Hole. (Many have commented on Japanese men's fetish for schoolgirl attire). For a discussion of the impact of such chaste/sexy fashion statements, see Davis (1992).

C. Rebelling Against Society or Oppressors

Illustration 3. An Islamic woman parades in a *nigab* to protest a new French law forbidding the veil in public schools. June 19, 2009
Marseille, southern France (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS)

In a chapter on "Oppositional dress" Wilson (1985), observed that various subcultures, from 19th century dandies to 20th century dandies to 20th century women, blacks, gays, and hippies, have resisted and opposed dominant groups by means of fashion and dress.

There is considerable evidence for her contention. Political powers often forced colonial subjects to wear a certain kind of dress in an effort to bring "civilization" to those subjects. In the 1980s, the French colonial powers banned the veil in Algeria; in 2004, the French banned head scarves (an Islamic symbol) in the public schools. Kemal Ataturk banned the fez in Turkey; during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, citizens were required to wear Maoist suits.

Not surprisingly, when citizens wish to rebel against their own society or colonial powers, they often adopt clothes that signal their opposition. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, for example, many women began to wear traditional Islamic garb to protest the power of the Shah of Iran, and to signal their solidarity with the new Islamic leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini.

In a classic article, Barthes (2006) provided a cultural critique of the hippie lifestyles and fashion.

> As an oppositional character, the hippy adopts a diametrically opposed position to the main values which underpin the way of life in the West; the hippy knows full well that this way of life is one where materialism is central and it is consumption of goods that he aims to undermine . . . Clothing (the outfit we should say) is, as we know, a specific sign, the main choice made by the hippy; in relation to the norms in the West, there is a dual subversion: either there is absolutely manic fantasy, so as to transgress the *limits* of what is conventional to make this into a clear sign of that transgression itself (brocade trousers; draped jackets; long, white nightshirts; going barefoot even out on the street) or by borrowing overtly from ethnic costumes: *djellabas, boubous,* Hindu tunics, all nonetheless rendered other by some aberrant detail (necklaces, multi-coloured, and multi-layered neckbands, etc.). Cleanliness (hygiene), the most important of American values (at least mythically), is counteracted in spectacular fashion: dirt on the body, in the hair, on the clothes; clothes dragging along the street, dusty feet, fair-haired babies playing in the gutter (pp. 110-111).

Today, punks make a similar assault on society's cherished values. Barnard (2000) says that punk is "an attack on the larger economic system that produced

the dole queue, the inner city wastelands and the absence of any meaningful future (p. 136). In their six-inch, jelled Mohicans, safety pins plunged through noses, cheeks, and chins; razor blades dangling from their ear lobes, spiked dog collars, ripped T-shirts, and trashy jeans, they thumb their nose at society (Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 1979). Fiske (1989) observed that jeans express popular ideas of freedom, hard work, and the American way; doing violence to them—by bleaching, tearing, and ripping—is a form of doing violence to this ideology.

For additional information on this topic, see Barnard (2002), Crane (2000), Davis (1992), Fiske (1989), Flügel (1930), and Hebdige (1979.).

D. Play

Illustration 4. M^{elle} Marcelle
Casino de Paris
Paris, France
1900-1929

Henri Lefebvre once observed “Let’s not forget that fashion is a game. Getting dressed up is wanting to play” (in Barthes, 2006, p. 90.) In ancient Rome, masked men and women paid tribute to the God Bacchus at the Bacchanalia, the mythic festival involving widespread drunkenness and orgies (Steele, 2001; Tseëlon, 2001). Today, some of the most bizarre masks and fashions are to be found at celebrations, such as the Mardi Gras, Halloween, spectacles, and at costume parties. Entertainers (actors, pop singers, dancers, and strippers) costume themselves in flamboyant garments to the delight of their audience, out for a night of fun.

The earlier times, African, Hawaiian, and Indian dancers wore fantastic headdresses, masks, and costumes at religious and other community celebrations. Throughout history, celebrants have painted their faces with charcoal, ochre, and colorful dyes. They’ve worn cloaks of rare and colorful *manio* feathers, flowers, leaves and shells.

In the 17th century, Nicolas Larmessin (1638) published *Costumes Grotesques.* For each profession, the playful engraver imagined a fancy work costume constructed from the tools of that trade. The designs were both poetic and embodied the imaginary essence of the trade: calm forms for the pastry maker, serpentine shapes for the apothecary, pointed angles for the fireworks manufacturer, rounded and humped for the potter, etc. The costume of The Printer is depicted below.

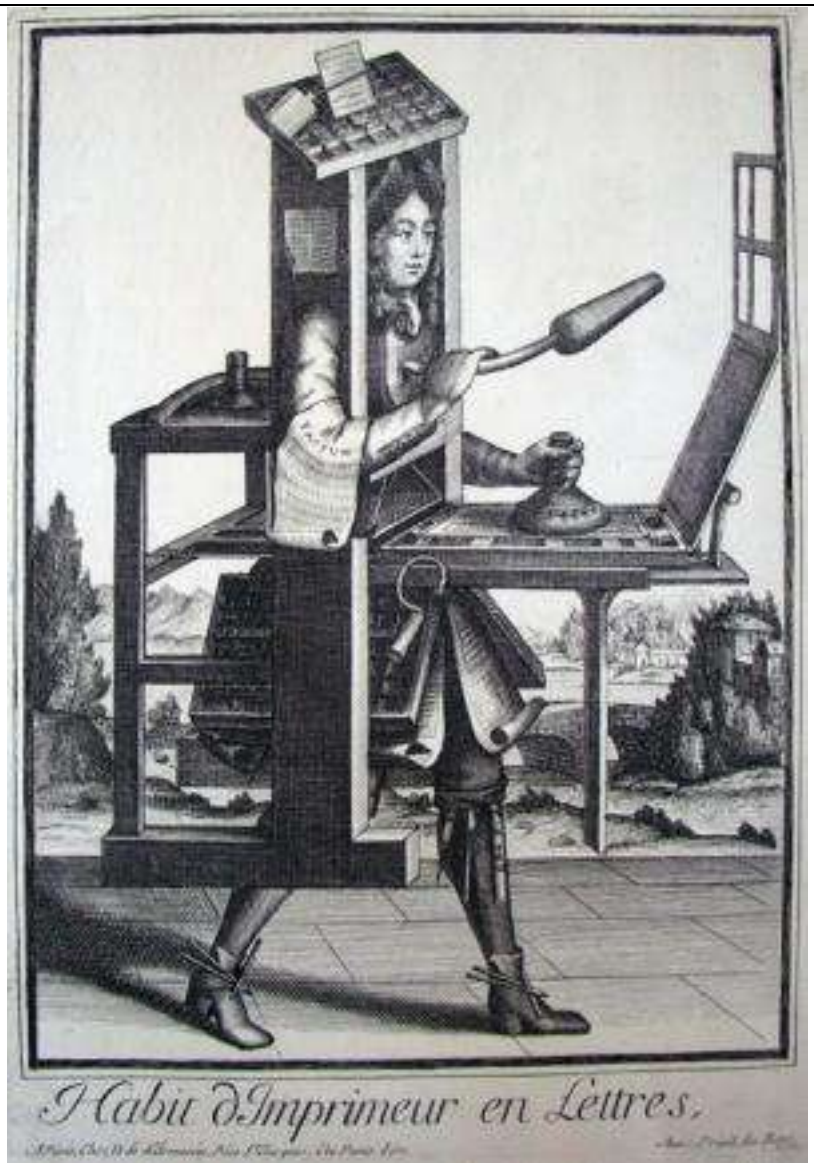

Illustration 5. Nicolas de Larmessin II (ca. 1638-1694), *Habit d'Imprimeur en Lettres* (*The Printer's Costume*), ca. 1680. Engraving.

E. Other Motives

Bizarre fashion choices have been shaped by a variety of other motivations, of course. These include such things as a love of novelty (Darwin, 1872), a desire to act out

repressed desires and fears (of cruelty, deathliness, trauma, disconnection, and dereliction (Evans, 2003), a yearning to dissent, protest, ridicule, and outrage (Davis, 1992). Davis (1992) mentions several motivations for anti-fashion: utilitarian outrage, health and fitness, naturalism, feminist protest, conservative skepticism, minority group disidentification, and countercultural insult.

Illustration 6. Paris Fashion Week
January 24, 2008.
http://gridskipper.com/archives/entries/064/64847.php

VII. Conclusions

Historically, people struggling just to survive, rarely sought self-expression in day-to-day fashion, much less in the idealization of the "bizarre." Although the politically powerful have probably been interested in "fashion" since the dawn of history, for people in general, a concern with fashion and anti-fashion may not have surfaced much before the 18th century Enlightenment. From that time onward, interest gained steam slowly, but inexorably. Today, in the Age of Individualism,

for both cultural and technological reasons, an interest in traditional fashion and the bizarre flourishes.

Contemporary men and women are often torn between a desire to be accepted by the community (as signaled by conventional dress) and a desire to rebel, to assert their individuality, get attention, and to play with fashion—as signaled by bizarre dress. As a consequence, people often switch from one to the other—never feeling perfectly comfortable with any single mode of existence. We may be entering an era of multiple identities, expressed by the multiple costumes we put on. What we wear may increasingly depend upon our mood and our sense of whom we wish to be that day.

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