

## **A Study on the Expression in Modern Fashion -Focusing on the Aesthetics Theory of Verfremdung-**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study was to analyze the 21C Fashion's expression related to 'Verfremdung' theory, in aesthetic theories established after modern times, and then to examine a new meaning and value.*

*The expressions of 'Verfremdung(estrangement)' in modern fashion, appear the followings: 1) placing distance with traditional sex and rational beauty of body. 2) paradox of inversion. 3) illogical juxtaposition by encounter. 4) dismantlement of material concept etc. After showing practically production technique that breaks traditional exception, that is, a new design method of open concept which drives positive idea about discrepancy of realities. This trial has warnings about art's self-control occurring at the time when aesthetic disinterestedness theory is expanded, and is considered indictment about a inhuman property of modern civilization, and culture, and is considered expression of will to show alienation by it.*

*Key words : estrangement(Verfremdung), open concept, aesthetic disinterestedness art's self-control.*

### **I. Introduction**

Fashion can express a variety of cultural logics by being adhered closely to social and cultural types. Then modern fashion shows a difficult inharmonic phenomenon to understand through the existing idea frameworks of up to this time, such as de-aesthetics, the aesthetic of ugliness, inconsistency etc. in the same way as the cultural de-structural phenomenon which spread in the whole art world. The trial to explain aesthetically these phenomena different from an existing idea, and also because of 'A comeback of the repressed' phenomenon, new concepts being ignored or having occupied

indifferent position so far, have been rising, and being recognized in new meaning and value.

This study is, in aesthetic theories established after modern times, to establish Brecht and 'Verfremdung' theory, and analyze the 21C Fashion's expression related to this theory, and then to examine a new meaning and value.

Brecht's theory and books, papers, and criticisms related to the philosophy and aesthetics related to the theory, and fashion magazine was used as research method. In addition, many fashion magazines and books were used to show how it is expressed in fashion since the mid 1980's, and with such examples, efforts have been made to examine the creative significance of new form of fashion.

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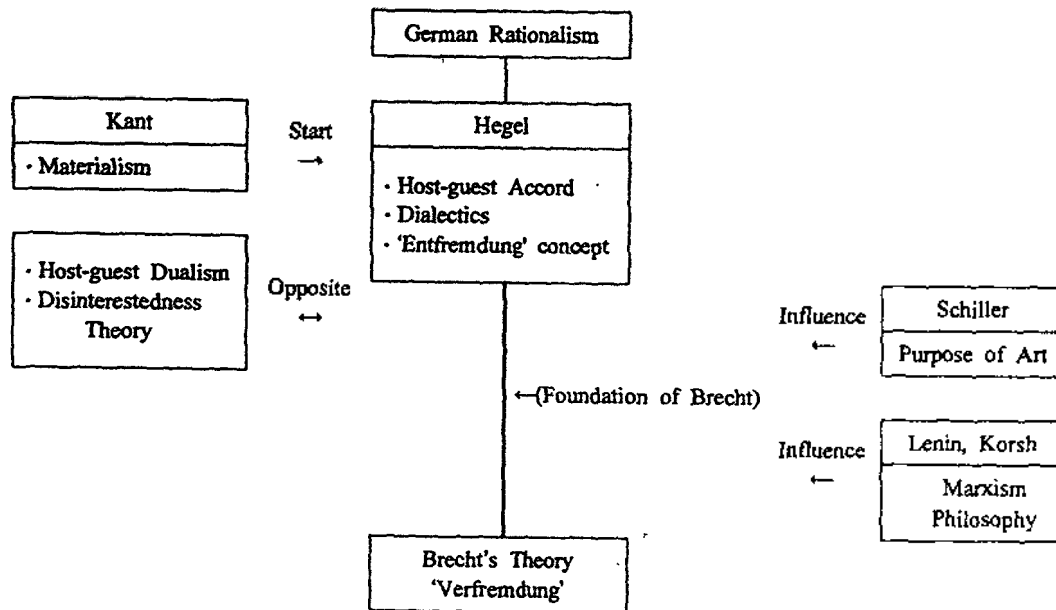
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## II. Verfremdung As An Artistic Theory

'Verfremdung' theory is a kind of play technique which an art-theorist and man of deeds, Brecht from Germany suggested, and it is a theory about 'estrangement' effect, when Kant's Aesthetic disinterestedness theory that has settled down in aesthetic theory like an axiom so far, didn't have any effect on modern people prosecuting about culture. Verfremdung theory located in Philosophy system of German rationalism from Kant to Marks, started from Kant's materialism idea<sup>1</sup>. But that denied wholly host-guest theory about Kant's sensitivity and

reason. And that was derived dialectic by host-guest accord of Hegel and Marks. This theory was also affected by Shiller about the purpose of art and by Marxism's philosophy of Lenin and K. Korsh, and then was a foundation of Brecht's theory. Finally that theory took Hegel's Entfremdung aesthetically, and then developed it.

A theory opposing Verfremdung's theory is the aesthetic disinterestedness theory that has developed since the 18th century<sup>2</sup>. This artistic theory was developed in a time when personal desire for economical gain was rationalized in all aspects of human beings, and it claimed that such morals that uses personal interest as inner motive is a 'clearly calculated epicureanism'



<Fig. 1> Setting Behind the Development of Verfremdung Theory

<sup>1</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelt Werke 15*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), 224-225

<sup>2</sup> The difference between the aesthetic disinterestedness theory and Verfremdung theory is that although both use the technique of placing distance, the former asks the viewer to exclude the moralistic view, while the latter asks the views to combine the art with the recognition and to expand it to social and political field. (Munhwan Kim, *Study of Modern Aesthetics*, (Seoul: Seoul National University, 1987), 31-40 Reference)

The theory asks people to distance themselves from such epicureanism. Kant's opinion that distinguishes pure interest for art and moral interest is criticized nowadays because it places distance between art and society, and therefore art's function to liberate through aesthetic freedom is lost, art becomes a product that produces maximum joy, and art has become a way to escape from reality<sup>3)</sup>.

'Verfremdung' theory is exhibited as type more structured, more one step developed than the Bullough's Physical distance theory<sup>4)</sup>. Brecht claims the existing bourgeois plays have made the views to think of the existing social classification as something natural and unchangeable. The plays doesn't induce the viewers to think actively by giving objectivity to reality. Instead it lets the viewers become a passive consumer. Therefore, showing the contradiction between the appearance and the essence can lead the spectators to think actively.

This is, a technique deriving an audience itself to think positively after objectifying the discrepancy of realities, rather than considering the realities of life as a unchangeable-natural thing. Brecht thought that it could be gained by making strange : alienation and impact effect, and than he experimented many productive techniques breaking conventional expectation for this effectiveness. According to Marxism's methodology, he considered art as something more closely to science, and he tried to break illusive art-theory through inducing exact-scientific methodology, that is, scientific experiment etc., into art. This trial driving discontinuation from the 19C realism, has something in common with Avant-garde's movement at that time that tried to intentional breakdown from the art concept of citizen society. That trial could be made by contradiction about systemic

art, attacked a false notion about art's self-control of citizen society, and tried to break organic factors of work after alienating each of them, which has independent components. The technique of these trials is considered a open system of thinking endlessly, and being able to correct freely.

### III. Verfremdung, Expressed Through Clothing

Modern fashion of 20C latter makes us consider every intimate-natural object not to be new and natural, and strongly shows a new 'estrangement' phenomenon as epochal trial challenging established aesthetics. That shows destroying organization by showing discrepancy of type and concept rather than by type and concept that enable perceptive realities to be reflected. The expressions of 'estrangement' in modern Fashion, appear the followings: 1) placing distance with traditional sex and rational beauty of body. 2) paradox of inversion. 3) illogical juxtaposition by encounter. 4) dismantlement of material concept etc.

#### 1. Placing Distance with Traditional Sex and Rational Beauty of Body

Fashion is in fact the only thing that expresses the body, while expressing the wearer's sex and idea of body at the same time<sup>5)</sup>. However the fashion of today show a contradiction with traditional sex and ideal body shape, and such contradiction, using the technique of estrangement, induces thinking in active thinking in the viewer. <Fig. 2> is Jean-Paul Gaultier's work, and it is different from traditional concept of sex, in that there is of inversion of men's and women's clothing. Gaultier shows a male with a feminine image, with long hair, wearing a skirt

<sup>3)</sup> Jan Knopf, "Verfremdung", in *Brecht's Theories des Theaters*, Hrsg Werner Hecht, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 93-95.

<sup>4)</sup> Ju-Hyun Soun, *A study on the aesthetics significance of the Verfremdung theory*, (Master's Thesis, Seoul : Seoul National University, 1996), 70.

<sup>5)</sup> A. Juliet, and E. Wilson, *Chic Thrills* (London: Pandor Press, 1992), 12.

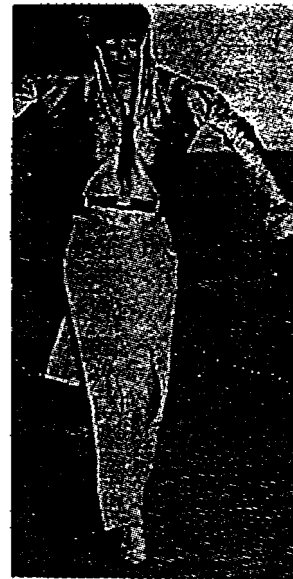


<Fig. 2> J. P. Gaultier, 94, 95 A/W  
(*Men's Collections*, Vol. 21, p. 24)



<Fig. 3> Romeo Gigli, 95, 96 A/W  
(*Fashion News*, Vol. 27, p. 68)

and punk accessories. He is treating the male as a female. <Fig. 3> is a work of Romeo Gigli, and it also shows a inversion of sex. By showing a female wearing a suit and a tie, it shows the concept of sexual inversion. This is a challenge toward traditional sexual dichotomy, such as feminine and masculine qualities, claiming that it is meaningless. As in above examples, estrangement technique is going between the two extreme sexes showing the individual image. In addition, the discord with the body and the subsequent ignoring of scale show the dismantlement of the beauty of body and clothing. Traditional concept regarding the size of clothing is based on body shape and proportion, and it is the standard of fitness. However the concept of 'right size' in modern fashion varies depending on the aesthetic point of view<sup>6</sup>. In <Fig. 4>, McQueen is showing the error in 'smallness' of size and incorrectness of clothing shape. The arm and chest of his



<Fig. 4> A. McQueen, 1997 (*Vogue Korea*,  
No. 6, p. 136)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

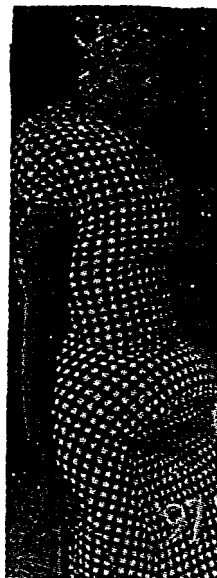
jacket can too narrow to wear. And he is giving an aesthetic impact by making fun of the distortion of body shape such as hip, bust and the bact in <Fig. 5>. They are intentionally showing clothing that doesn't agree with the rational concept of right size and fitness. They are proposing a new aesthetic view by showing optical distortion and randomness. In other words, traditional clothing was one with specific shapes, but nowadays, clothes without appropriate shapes, such as unsewed clothing, clothing with the least amount of sewing done, and unironed clothing are suggested as beautiful<sup>7</sup>. This is in accord with the Hegel dialectic. Non-form of ugliness, which is the antithesis of beauty, leads to dismantlement of traditional concept of aesthetics.

## 2. Paradox of Inversion

Nowadays many clothing challenges traditional fashion by placing ornaments on strange

places and moving articles of clothing to different parts of the body. As E. Schiparelli used surrealist Depaysement technique to show aesthetic Entfremdung and shock effect in the 1930's, in modern fashion, paradox of inversion is one of the expressive factor of estrangement technique.

<Fig. 6> is a work of Deco Sugal that used the Depaysement technique. This shows the paradox effect by wearing a clothes the other way around or wearing it sideways. <Fig. 7> is a work of Kosuke Tsumura. The position of neck on the shirt is moved, making look like an ornament on clothes. Such clothing with paradoxical concept is giving a fresh impact. Another example of inversion and transfiguration in modern fashion is the wearing of underwear outside. <Fig. 8> is a parody of underwear as outerwear. Since parody has both the respect and ridicule for the original, wearing the underwear outside shows ridicule for the social



<Fig. 5> A. McQueen, 97 S/S (*Vogue Korea*, No. 8, p. 185)



<Fig. 6> Deco Sugal, 95, 96 A/W (*Fashion News*, Vol. 28, p. 58)

<sup>7</sup> Juyoung Kim, "Dismantlement in Modern Fashion", (Master's Thesis, Sukmyung Women's University 1995), 96.



<Fig. 7> K. Tsumura, 95, 96 A/W (*Fashion News*, Vol. 26, p. 99)



<Fig. 8> Karl Lagerfeld, 92 S/S (*Mode et Mode*, No. 277, p. 46)

repression and respect for its artistic value and freedom of sexual expression through showing

it. The irony of intentional showing of underwear that used to be hidden, is the avant-garde tendency of modern fashion. Such technique of inversion, with the paradoxical clothing, gives fresh impact and pleasure.

### 3. Illogical Juxtaposition

Chance comes from the concept of 'Objective Chance' of surrealism. This chooses agreeing characteristics in unrelated events, in other words the paradox of concurrent chance and order. The illogical juxtaposition shown in fashion is an objective chance. Modern fashion with difficult and dim illogical juxtaposition adheres to the principle of inappropriateness. <Fig. 9>, a work of Moschino, is an estrangement effect achieved by wearing independent items randomly. By wearing underwear over a jacket and wearing multi-layers of skirt, in other words, by wearing items out of place, strange impact is aimed. <Fig. 10> is a work of Kosuke Tsumura. This expresses the paradox of inappropriateness by intentionally silly juxtaposing cap for nurses, long jacket, and a long skirt, belt



<Fig. 9> Moschino, 95, 96 A/W (*Fashion News*, Vol. 27, p. 153)



<Fig. 10> K. Tsumura, 95, 96 A/W  
(*Fashion News*, Vol. 27, p. 99)



<Fig. 11> Y. Yamamoto, 95, 96 A/W  
(*Fashion News*, Vol. 28 p. 16)

worn in a lower position, and boots. <Fig. 11>, a work of Yohji Yamamoto, uses inappropriate materials inappropriately to achieve resistance to conventional beauty and estrangement effect. This a irony and paradox effect achieved by juxtaposing items for different occasions and of different materials. The chaos in the concept of T.P.O and the dismantlement of the concept of ugliness and beauty. These are the characteristics of the third wave of fashion.

#### 4. Dismantlement of Materials for Clothing

As high technology and media culture emerges, designers are demanded by dynamic rhythm of quick movement and quick circulation of image, to choose factors that fits the situation. Designers are trying to mix Madier-istic concept to regress in history or to find new shocking themes The experiment of Madier in fashion is to do away with the border of clothing material through 'distortion of material' New development of fashion material is becoming important concern in pursuing freshness and dimness. As in <Fig. 12>, new revolutionary



<Fig. 12> Krizia(97/12), (*Fashion News*, Vol. 44, p. 147)

materials, using many techniques such as making holes, wrinkling, and tearing, are emerging. This

shows of infinite creative potential of clothing material. Thierry Mugler's work(Fig. 13), using



<Fig. 13> T. Mugler (92 S/S),  
(*Mode et Mode*, No. 277)



<Fig. 14> Kyoko Higa(94, 95 A/W)의  
작품 (*Collections III*, p. 195)



<Fig. 15> T. Mugler(91/ A/W), (*Mode et  
Mode*, No. 275, p. 35)

ready-made objects of modern industry, paradoxically expresses the estranged humans because of the materialistic civilization. With a popular image, <Fig. 14> is Kyoko Higa's work that is against the image of high fashion and kichi-object, using industrial waste. <Fig. 15> is a work of Mugler which adopted rubber, leather, polyurethane, metal-let, and paper as material for clothing. This is also a challenge to the conventional concept of appropriate material. and it give a unexpected impact. As in above examples, modern fashion through development of various materials shows shocking pleasure and infinite potential for creativeness.

#### IV. Conclusion

As in above, the expressions of 'estrangement' in modern Fashion, appear the followings: placing distance with traditional sex and rational beauty of body, paradox of inversion, illogical juxtaposition by encounter, dismantlement of material concept etc. And this appears differently from pleasure-pursuing design that empha-



size pure-aesthetic interests such as indifference, unconsciousness, and no-meaning. After showing practically production technique that breaks traditional exception, that is, a new design method of open concept which drives positive idea about discrepancy of realities.

The true art suggested by the estrangement technique is not an impression of reality but a foreknowledge of the future. Designers are trying to defy all aesthetic techniques of emotional identity and pure aesthetic pleasure; they are objectifying by contradicting the contradictions in reality. Such try warns against the aesthetic autonomy that occurs when disinterestedness theory expands infinitely. It also expresses the will to show inhumane nature of modern civilization and culture, and the subsequent estrangement of human beings.

In other words, emphasis of unconsciousness in forming the art and emphasis of 'pure esthetics that is separated from reality in examining the art can lead to epicureanism. It can be overcome by artistic creations that emphasizes autonomy and yet have interest in the community.

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