

More Adjectives and Dress: Version 1B

Elevated and Depressed: How adjectives enter our understanding of dress

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun to make it more specific.

Like all studies interested in the relation between language and dress this essay places itself within the field opened up by Roland Barthes in *The Fashion System*.

(1) I want to explore how certain adjectives insinuate themselves into our dress and so become inseparable not only from what is new but also from dress that is old and aging.

The first part of the essay deals with the consequences for dress of being described by what I have called 'elevated' adjectives. The adjectives examined here are smart, elegant and graceful and they are 'elevated' because in each instance they refer to a condition of dress considered above that of the average. These 'elevated' dress states are not just superior examples of tailoring and dressmaking. Smart, elegant and graceful carry 'elevated' moral judgements as well. Together with a close examination of each of these 'elevated' adjectives there will be an investigation as to how and why such judgements come into being.

For each of these 'elevated' adjectives applied to our dress there are a number of adjectives that describe what we wear in disparaging terms. These 'depressive' adjectives correspond to the antonyms of smart, elegant and graceful. These are shabby and dishevelled. Awkward and clumsy. Ugly and secular. I have called these adjectives 'depressive' because they refer to states of dress that fall below the average. The inclusion of secular is rather an eccentric choice. Rather than acting as a straightforward negation of graceful it behaves in the manner of a

seductive atheism. It carries a promise that a plain, no nonsense form of dress exists somewhere. Secular dress is something that would be devoid of all traces of 'elevation'.(2)

In the final section of the essay the two orders of adjectives will be brought together. The 'elevated' and the 'depressive' form a network of relationships. Each of the 'depressive' adjectives refers to degradations that derive from 'elevated' adjectives. It is the loss of the 'newness' of a garment and the emergence of the strange, morally charged entity that will be examined in the final part of this essay.

Notes

(1) Barthes, Roland, *The Fashion System*, Hill and Wang, 1983, New York.

(2) Gregg, Melissa, 'The Importance of Being Ordinary'

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