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It feels a little anachronistic to be writing about fashion right now. We’re still relatively fresh from pyjama-wearing lockdowns, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that we’ve already passed a number of environmental tipping points that pretty much guarantee we’re on course to disaster. The idea that we should go out and buy clothes we don’t need, to impress people who probably don’t care, makes little sense. The clothing industry accounts for 10 per cent of the world’s carbon emissions, while flying contributes a mere 2.4 per cent. Clothing production is also responsible for 20 per cent of the world’s wastewater, not to mention widespread labour rights abuses, plus its part in industrial farming for the production of wool and leather. As people often like to point out these days, a T-shirt that costs £3.00 comes with untold costs for the planet. So by far the most sensible thing to say about fashion is simply: ‘stop!’

Still, many of us remember the days when the seasonal influx of new shapes, colours and textures into the luminous paradises of H&M, Topshop and Miss Selfridge seemed a cause for celebration and joy. Like

children who grew up eating chops only to discover that their favourite supper was hacked from the corpse of a fluffy lamb, we have somehow to metabolise the cognitive dissonance produced by the realisation that, all along, we've been funding a toxic regime. We understood that fashion was a bit scoundrelly from the way it knew how to prey on our insecurities in order to make us part with our cash. We were aware of the part it played in the proliferation of eating disorders. We'd clocked that reading *Vogue* often made us temporarily depressed. We'd seen *Zoolander* and *The Devil Wears Prada* and basically agreed that fashionable people can be idiots. But perhaps we didn't realise how enthusiastically it was ushering us headlong towards the apocalypse.

One small sign of hope is that the fashion industry itself now knows that we know that things can't go on this way. Heightened awareness of the severity of the climate crisis, plus the body positivity movement, plus an insistence on diversity that goes beyond tokenism all mean you can't keep pumping out images of skinny, white women in all-new swag and expect people to like you. Fashion, in the old sense, has become desperately uncool. Into this new space we're seeing a flood of upcycling, the use of reclaimed deadstock and an army of widely divergent bodies and faces. But is that enough to save fashion from the obsolescence it probably deserves?

Maybe not. But . . . I LOVE fashion and can't help

wishing that something of its ways could have a place in the future. The paradox of preserving an imaginary space in a future jeopardised by the very thing you're trying to save is hard to justify, but perhaps that can be the improbable purpose of this book. In order to get there, we can skip through the history of fashion and see what industrial and psychological forces caused it to take its present shape. We can look at the ways in which clothes, and changes of style, can help us to inhabit our bodies; and at fashion as a very particular art form, with its wonky combination of 'genius creators', mass production and unpredictable crowd behaviours. We will consider beauty, harm, technology and time as factors at work in the proliferation of new sartorial ideas, and ultimately argue for the possibility of fashion as an anarchic, hyper-social force for good. Or at least to put forward a new kind of fashion logic, purged of its traditional capacity for evil.

I feel I should declare my fashion credentials up front as they far from qualify me for rewriting the entire system. I spent many evenings growing up watching my mother dressing up to go out. I never wanted her to leave and would lounge around on her bed, extracting whatever enjoyment I could from her transitory presence. She was a journalist and fierce lunchtime shopper, always coming home with freshly-purchased, spangled, printed dresses, huge geometric earrings and colourful shoes – not to mention some quite experimental haircuts. Observing her, I made

the link between exciting clothes and an exciting life: outfits like that demanded commensurate outings. If you wore amazing clothes, your life had to match them.

At the age of fourteen I decided that my life urgently needed to become more exciting, but my pocket money didn't go far in Chelsea Girl. I learnt to use a sewing machine, follow patterns, and scavenge for scraps of material in the laundry cupboard. My experimental wardrobe, made from dyed sheets and curtains – intercut with the odd charity shop find – meant I could become a hair model for Antenna, Boy George's hairdresser, which in turn meant I could hang out with other weirdly dressed people and even occasionally get into nightclubs. Thanks to clothes, my life finally began.

Since then my wardrobe has always been a mixture of home-made, second-hand and whatever I could afford from the Vivienne Westwood sale. Not to mention the odd H&M splurge. After going to art school and realising that it didn't qualify me for anything, I offered myself to the super-stylist, Katie Grand, as an intern. Amazingly, she said yes, but then another job got in the way. I've also visited the upper floors of Vogue House to be vetted for their subs desk. (My interviewer visibly scribbled encouraging comments on the form, then I never heard from her again.) I've written the occasional article for fashion magazines, done webcasts with influencers and presented papers about fashion at psychoanalytic conferences. I've

always bought and sold vintage clothing, and had a stall in Portobello in the 90s. I can make a bra and pants from scratch. I'm hardly Grace Coddington, but I've done my time.

I became interested in fashion in a more theoretical sense at art school in the 90s, where we were encouraged to read psychoanalysis and critical theory. There were people, like turn-of-the-twentieth-century sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who treated fashion as an added extra that could be subtracted from our lives without any of us noticing that anything was missing. But then there were others, like the nineteenth-century French literary hero, Charles Baudelaire, who saw fashion as being inextricable from the rest of modern culture. I was amazed to discover that Freud and Lacan were both major fashion hags, and also that they made fascinating comments about clothing here and there in their work. Then there was Roland Barthes's mind-bending *The Fashion System* (1967), a semiotic study of the verbal and visual languages of fashion. Barthes explains that fashion is a language in which each garment is a word – in that its relation to meaning is arbitrary. But above all there was J. C. Flügel's seminal book *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930) which was almost impossible to borrow from the Goldsmiths' Library because it was always on loan to the legendary make-up artist Phyllis Cohen, who was studying fine art at the time. Flügel's book is cited in almost all subsequent books about the history, psychology